CHAPTER XII

SISTER ROSALIE’S NETWORK OF CHARITY

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

Whenever Sister Rosalie was praised for her accomplishments or courage, she always gave some variation of the same response, “I am a Daughter of Charity and only that.” Indeed, it is doubtful that the little girl, born and raised in the tiny village of Confort in the Jura, would have become the woman she was, and touched all the lives she did, were she not. In nearly all circumstances, her activities, be they simple or heroic, were accomplished by “Sister Rosalie and the sisters of her house.” The sisters of the little house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois were unquestionably Sister Rosalie’s closest collaborators. They also taught and cared for children; served the sick and elderly; visited those who were poor in their homes; tended the wounded and dying; stood at the bedside of cholera victims; welcomed and mentored volunteers; seconded her in her work with associations, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Ladies of Charity; and even wrote some of her letters. Thus, no study of Sister Rosalie’s network of charity would be complete without an examination of the life she shared with these equally dedicated women who, like her, were “totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor.”

In Chapter VII, we discussed Sister Rosalie’s spiritual life in an effort to respond to critics who claimed that she sacrificed prayer so as to respond to the nearly overwhelming needs of the poor masses around her. However, her letters, as well as the testimony of those who lived or worked closely with her, belie this. In Chapter XI, we addressed two other criticisms sometimes leveled against her, namely that she was not sufficiently exact in keeping accounts and that she undertook services for those in need without the knowledge or permission of her superiors. Once again, Sister Rosalie’s correspondence and the testimony of persons with knowledge of the matter contradict this. Let us now turn our attention to yet another criticism of her, namely that her community life fell victim to her dedicated service. This allegation is all the more serious as Sister Rosalie was the local superior, or Sister Servant, of the house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois from 1815 until her death in 1856. As such, she had a profound affect on the quality of the
community life of her companions as well as their apostolic activities as, at this epoch, the Sister Servant was also in charge of all the works of the house. What does the criticism of Sister Rosalie in this respect tell us, how much credence should it be given, and what do we know of her life within the Company? To answer these questions with some degree of objectivity, we shall listen to the voices raised against her as well as the testimonies of love and respect from those who shared her life in community or worked with her and her companions.

The Voice of Sister Rosalie’s Critics. Amidst the nearly universal admiration and love that surrounded Sister Rosalie there were some voices raised in protest, claiming that her accomplishments in the service of those who were poor, extraordinary as they might be, came at too high a price. Moreover, it should be pointed out that, with each passing year, her reputation grew. From the highest levels of power and wealth in the capital to the city’s most miserable hovels, her name was pronounced reverently. Furthermore, such widespread adulation was unquestionably unique for a religious woman in the Church of nineteenth-century France, particularly one who was neither a foundress nor a major superior. Nor does a close examination of her life and activity totally explain this phenomenon. What is certain is that she was, as contemporary parlance would put it, very “high profile.” As such, she would inevitably draw criticism.

The little house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois was similar to other houses of the Daughters of Charity in Paris at this time. A number of them were in close proximity to Sister Rosalie’s house and offered approximately the same services to those in need. Nor was the composition of the houses much different. A document in the National Archives dated 1805 on The State of the Establishments of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul lists 21 houses in Paris, including the Motherhouse. Of them, 15 also had schools and the sisters in them visited the sick in their homes. One of these houses had seven sisters (Saint-Merry). Another six, including Saint-Marcel, had six sisters. The remaining houses had five, four, or three sisters. While we do not know who the sisters were who lived and served the needy in these houses, it is safe to assume that the vast majority were, like the sisters of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois, Daughters of Charity “totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor.” Nothing

appears to distinguish these houses one from another except Sister Rosalie herself. It is not surprising then that such a situation would provoke criticism within the Community of Daughters of Charity ranging from mild disapproval to resentment or jealousy. Let us now take a closer look at the allegations.

It is important to note from the outset that we know nothing of all this from Sister Rosalie herself, nor of the pain it caused her sensitive heart. This is especially true when the criticism came from her superiors. She was always loyal to them and would never allow her companions to complain about them in her presence. On one occasion, a young sister of the house was joking about Father Étienne's corpulence. Sister Rosalie responded "severely" to her companion, "If we see [our] superiors in God, their humanity will be like the burning bush for Moses which hid the sight of God Himself from him."

Moreover, Sister Rosalie refused to impute any ill-will to them saying only, "Our superiors are very good but they cannot see everything. We must pity [them] as they have a great deal to do and have enormous responsibilities. Let us pray earnestly for them."

Thus, what we do know of any of this comes from the testimony of others who learned of the situation from a third party. Sister Costalin supports this assertion, declaring that Sister Rosalie "had to endure some very delicate trials as our superiors were erroneously influenced concerning her. Although nothing was more painful for her, she never let it show [and spoke of superiors] with incomparable respect."

On several occasions during her life, then, Sister Rosalie appears to have had strained relations with her superiors. In Chapter IX, we discussed the difficulties caused by her comportment during and after the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Now we will address the problems that seem to have resulted from complaints raised against her from within the Daughters of Charity, and even from her own companions. The facts are clear concerning Sister Rosalie's actions at the time of the revolutions, and the reaction of her superiors is comprehensible as both the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity could have been adversely affected by them. Such is not the case for protests raised against

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57 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Postila, Sommaire, 46.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
her to the superiors of the Daughters of Charity by members of the Community itself. We know that there were complaints but we lack details relative to the nature of the accusations; how many there were; when they occurred; by whom they were made; and what action, if any, was taken as a result of them.

Notwithstanding, at least some of the criticism, if not most of it, seems to have been occasioned by Sister Rosalie's close dealings not only with the wealthy but also the powerful of the capital. Sister Costalin supports this interpretation when she states in her testimony:

Objections have been raised that [Sister Rosalie's] life was not that of a Daughter of Charity in the ordinary circumstances of life. Yet our blessed Father [Saint Vincent], himself, led a life that was very different from that of his successors.

He assisted at the Council of the Regent [Anne of Austria]; was involved in public affairs; and frequented the gatherings of the most illustrious [personages] in France. Such, however, was the guidance of God in his life, that he wanted his sons [the Priests of the Mission] to evangelize only those who were lowly and those who were poor. He preached at court but wanted [his followers] to avoid accepting positions in large cities or in cathedrals.

We cannot blame souls for the particular designs of Providence in their regard especially when the result is for the glory of God and the [good] of the community.\[^{600}\]

On the surface, this comparison of Sister Rosalie to Vincent de Paul is apt. Both were born in tiny villages, into families of tillers of the soil, but spent most of their adult lives in Paris. Both had easy access to the mighty but retained great simplicity in their dealings with them; Vincent wore his faded but clean and mended cassock to court; Sister Rosalie received all her visitors dressed in her white work.

\[^{600}\] Ibid., 41.
apron like all the other Daughters of Charity of the house. Neither sought nor accepted any personal gain from their contact with the wealthy and powerful of France. For both Vincent de Paul and Sister Rosalie these personages were valued and respected collaborators in the Vincentian Mission of service of Jesus Christ in the person of those who were poor. They were never viewed only as funding sources. Rather they found in both Vincent and Sister Rosalie friendship, concern for them and their families, compassion, and support in their joys and sorrows. They were also given assistance, sometimes even monetary, when needed. And they were recipients of prayers and gratitude as both Sister Rosalie and Vincent were keenly aware that these wealthy and influential people were essential to the service of those who were poor.

While these similarities are noteworthy and potential justification for Sister Rosalie in the eyes of her critics, there are striking differences between the Founder and his nineteenth-century Daughter. Vincent was a man, a priest, well-educated, despite his protestations to the contrary, a gifted spiritual director, an outstanding educator and reformer of the clergy, and founder of two religious congregations, as well as the Ladies of Charity. Sister Rosalie, on the other hand, was a consecrated woman, minimally educated, and a local superior in a small house in the poorest district of the capital. More significant yet, Vincent walked the corridors of the civil and ecclesiastical power of his day. Sister Rosalie rarely left the house and, when she did so, it was generally to visit those who were sick and poor in their hovels. The rich and powerful came to her, mingled with those in need waiting to see her, and patiently awaited their turn to speak with her. Sister Tissot recounts such an incident:

One day while [Sister Rosalie] was preparing [a treatment], the doorbell rang and we saw three important gentlemen there. She said, "I ask your permission to finish with this poor man who is suffering." These gentlemen remained in the courtyard while she lanced [a sore].... then she went to greet her visitors who were none other than General Cavaignac, the President of the Republic at the time, his Secretary, and his Minister, Monsieur Falloux. I [Sister Tissot] said to her, "Mother, what
will these gentlemen, whom you kept waiting like that, think?"

[Sister Rosalie] responded, "My daughter, they will think we were doing our duty. We are here for those who are poor."

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac formed the early Daughters of Charity to collaborate with the rich so that those who were poor would be better served. Sister Rosalie did the same with the sisters of her house. Sister Tissot recalls:

[Sister Rosalie] knew how to engage her numerous wealthy visitors for the benefit of those who were poor. She could discern, at a glance, what she might expect of them that would benefit [those in need].

When [her visitors] thanked her for her gracious hospitality and her advice, we would hear her respond, "I am the one who is grateful to you. Now that I have the honor of knowing you, I can lay claim to your protection for a poor father of a family who needs a post in the administration; your guidance for a young man who has been referred to me; an occasional visit to a poor sick person; alms to be distributed." She would later say to us, "We render them a service by giving them the opportunity to do good works. We are more blessed than these great ladies in their silk dresses, [traveling about in] their horse and carriage. Come now, my Sisters, they often have many trials and we have the better part. Let us act in a spirit of faith; let us love our Good God; let us not bargain about [our] duty; let us serve the poor well and always speak to them with great kindness."

When Sister Rosalie dealt with persons of lesser means, such as students who had been referred to her, she would give them tasks

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601 Ibid., 57-58.
602 Ibid., 56-57.
to accomplish; for instance, she would have them use their free time to write letters for her concerning the needs of those who were poor or visit the sick. She would not accept their money that she knew was in short supply. One day, Sister Tissot heard her superior say to a student, "My Friend, you need to be liberated before being liberal. Your family is not able to give money. You, give of yourself, now. Later on, you will give what belongs to you."  

Thus, Sister Rosalie involved all who approached her, in keeping within their means, in the service of her "beloved poor" of the Mouffetard district. Among these persons were some of the wealthiest and most powerful of the capital. She would not escape criticism for including them in her network of charity, but this did not deter her from doing so.

There were two episodes that raised Sister Rosalie's profile yet more, and certainly did nothing to silence critics who felt she was too close to the rich and powerful. First, she was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor on 27 February 1852. Second, she welcomed Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie when they came to visit the Day Nursery on 18 March 1854.

_The Cross of the Legion of Honor._ It must be pointed out immediately that the awarding of the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Sister Rosalie was truly extraordinary and, therefore, destined to attract wide attention to her and to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Instituted by Napoléon I, the Cross of the Legion of Honor was among the highest symbols of recognition in the realm. Moreover, it was generally conferred on men.

We possess two documents relative to this honor. We will cite both textually, beginning with the Emperor's Decree:

_In the name of the French People_

_Louis Napoléon_

_President of the French Republic_

On the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior,

Given the acts of courage, devotedness, and admirable charity which have marked the long life

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of Mademoiselle Rendu (in religion Sister Rosalie), superior of the house of charity maintained in Paris by the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul at 5, rue de l'Épée-de-Bois:

Considering that, for 50 years, Sister Rosalie, by all the types of care she has bestowed on the poor and unfortunate, has shown herself to be the worthy imitator of Sister Marthe, gloriously decorated by the Emperor,

**Decrees**

Art. 1. The decoration of the National Order of the Legion of Honor is accorded to Sister Rosalie of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Art. 2. The Minister of the Interior is charged with the execution of this decree.

Issued at the Tuileries Palace, 27 February 1852.

Louis Napoléon
By the Prince President
Minister of the Interior
F. DE PERSIGNY

The second document is a letter to Sister Rosalie from the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Gilbert Victor Fialin, duc de Persigny (1808-1872), dated 28 February 1852, announcing his time of arrival at the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois to confer the honor:

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604 Imperial Decree awarding the Cross of the Legion of Honor to Sister Rosalie, 27 February 1852. Original, AFCP, 812 - Ro - Doc. 44.
Office of The Ministry of the Interior

Paris, 28 February 1852.

Madame, most honored Sister,

The Prince President of the Republic has just awarded you the decoration of the National Order of the Legion of Honor.

The Prince was happy to thus testify to the very special esteem your noble and admirable life has inspired in him, and the value he attaches to the services rendered to the working classes who are the constant object of his solicitude.

I am personally proud that I was able to be associated with the Emperor’s thought in this matter. Not wanting to yield to anyone the pleasure of bestowing this richly deserved Cross on you, I plan to be at your house this afternoon at 4 o’clock to bring it to you myself.

Accept, Madame and most honored Sister, the homage of my deep veneration

Minister of the Interior
Signed: F. DE PERSIGNY

Letter of Monsieur Jean-Gilbert Victor Fialin, due de Persigny, Minister of the Interior, to Sister Rosalie, 28 February 1852, Original, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le - 12.
These are the official documents. We now turn to those who were close to Sister Rosalie at this time and can testify to her reaction to this honor – Armand de Melun, her sister companions, and Mademoiselle Baccoffe. Melun described his friend’s reaction when she learned that she was to receive this award:

"...she was greatly surprised and extremely distressed because, after having energetically declined it, she yielded only for fear of offending the hand that was presenting it. She never wore it and her humility was so wounded that she was ill for several days. She was always very upset when any allusion was made to this favor that she considered one of the greatest trials of her life." 606.

We learn further details from Sister Costalin, who spoke of the event from the perspective of Sister Rosalie as a Daughter of Charity. When she first learned about the proposed honor, Sister Rosalie thought she was the object of some kind of hoax and was heard to say:

"I have merited this shame because of my sins; but for the Community, I regret it. All Paris will be laughing at us." ...[Sister Rosalie] did [everything she could] so that the Cross would be awarded to

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606 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 142.
one of our administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance rather than to her.... She also sent Sister [Marguerite-Aglée] Esparbier, [the oldest sister in vocation in the house – 21 years], to Father Étienne [to learn his opinion]. Here are the exact words of his response, “Tell Sister Rosalie that it is a cross like any other. She should give it no more importance than we will.... She must not cause us any problems with these people.”

Thus, Sister Rosalie, to her chagrin, accepted the honor. The sisters of the house knew of it just two hours before the arrival of Monsieur de Persigny, when a beautiful bouquet of flowers arrived for her from the women working at the market, Les Halles. Indeed, Sister Rosalie’s “beloved poor” rejoiced to see their Mother thus honored. They considered themselves “decorated in her person.”

Sister Costalin graphically described her superior’s reaction immediately following the brief ceremony, “...the door had hardly closed behind Monsieur de Persigny when [Sister Rosalie] ripped the Cross from her collar and threw it behind some furniture exclaiming, ‘It is not with this that the poor are fed.’”

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607 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 47-48.
608 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 142.
609 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 48.
Sister Saillard recounted that, at the time of Sister Rosalie's death, the sisters of the house searched for the Cross; however, "she had hidden it so well that we had great difficulty in finding it. We wanted to place it on her casket along with her crown [the small wreath worn during this era at the celebration following pronouncing vows for the first time] and her side rosary."

We know of Sister Rosalie's distress with this whole affair as well as the joy of her friends, collaborators, and the poor whom she and the sisters of her house served. But how did the award come about? Who set it in motion? The culprit, as Sister Rosalie would consider the person behind the honor, was none other than Mademoiselle Marie Baccoffe de Montmahaut, a friend and admirer of Sister Rosalie since childhood. As we discussed earlier, her father was the officer of the Civil Guard, whose life Sister Rosalie saved. Years later, now well-placed at the court of Napoléon III, the little girl who, at age six, wanted to buy new chairs for Sister Rosalie's shabby parlor, sought a way to repay her. She explained:

I had an idea that was going to work out for me. I had a number of friends among the great families of the era. I had only one desire, to settle my father's debt to the one who had helped to save his life.... [I went to] Monsieur de Persigny; Monsieur Pépin Saint-Hilaire, who was the defender of Napoléon III and later Secretary of the Works of the Empress; Madame Duclos, who was very loved by Napoléon III; and lastly, Admiral Excelmans....

Finally, I learned from Monsieur de Morny that Sister Rosalie had been proposed for the Cross. I wanted to be certain of this good news so I went to him myself, and he told me that he and Monsieur de Persigny would go to present it to [Sister Rosalie the next day].... I was [then] taken to her house. She was going to rue Pascal... so I accompanied her.... I told her that she would see me the [next day] because she would at last have the Cross. She said, "Come now, little one. You are a foolish child." She had

610 Ibid., 66.
not yet received the letter. From [the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois] I went to thank all those who had supported me. Monsieur de Persigny said, "At last you are happy. You are satisfied and grateful." When I returned home the whole house was as happy as I was. The next day, as I embraced [Sister Rosalie], I said, "I have finally paid a small part of papa's debt. I felt a tear on my cheek as I held her."611

Thus, this event, which added considerably to Sister Rosalie's prestige, while assaulting her humility, was behind her. As far as she was concerned, it was never to be spoken of again.

The Visit of Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie. Two years later, on 18 March 1854, she was once again in the public eye. On that day, Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie visited the Day Nursery of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. This time, however, Sister Rosalie's reaction was very different. She looked upon this expression of interest by the Imperial Couple with respect and gratitude. She saw their example as a lesson, for all administrators, in generosity and charity to the lowly and the weak, and an encouragement for all with power in the public sector, whatever the level, to be attentive and compassionate toward the unfortunate.612

The artist Édouard-Alexandre Sain (1830-1910), commemorated the visit in a painting now housed at the Compiègne Museum. However, for Sister Rosalie, there were more lasting reminders. She profited from the occasion to obtain assistance from the Empress for two works dear to her heart, the Day Nursery and a Shelter for the Elderly. She obtained reliable funding so that infants' mothers no longer had to pay to have their babies at the Day Nursery, and had the Shelter for the Elderly placed under the direction of the Daughters of Charity. Thus, this very "high profile" visit brought joy to Sister Rosalie's heart because, as a result, her "beloved poor" would be better served.

In the chapter on Sister Rosalie in his La charité et la misère à Paris, Mullois recounted an anecdote related to this Imperial visit. He wrote:

611 Ibid., 69-70.
612 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 142-143.
Last year, the Emperor and Empress wanted to visit the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. The news spread throughout the district so, several hours ahead of time, the streets adjacent to the house were filled with masses of poor persons who... wanted to see the Imperial Couple. However, the police had taken over the area and kept them at a distance. Sister Rosalie was very upset by this. She vainly argued that these were her children and she would answer for them. The police remained adamant.

The Emperor had barely descended from his carriage when the good superior expressed her distress and her objections. The order was immediately issued to let everyone approach. The crowd flooded around the carriages. When it was time to leave, [the Imperial Couple and their retinue] could hardly get though. It was truly a pleasure to see the masses so respectful and so filled with enthusiasm. Sister Rosalie had prevailed.613

This anecdote once again illustrates Sister Rosalie's love and respect for those whom she and the sisters of the house served. She felt that her "beloved poor" had a right to be present and to share in the visit. She did not stop until that had happened.

Besides General Cavaignac, Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie, there were other very highly placed persons who came to visit Sister Rosalie. Melun writes:

The sovereigns who succeeded one another in France turned to her and paid homage to her charity. Charles X could not overlook her in his truly royal generosity and had large charitable sums pass through her hands. The Dauphine [whom we mentioned in Chapter XI] associated [Sister Rosalie] to her intelligent practice of good deeds and to the numerous works in which she engaged to find comfort in her misfortunes....

613 Abbé Jacques-Isidore Mullois, *La charité et la misère à Paris* (Lyon, 1856), 190.
The Revolution of 1830 lessened [Sister Rosalie's] resources but Queen Marie-Amélie, spouse of Louis-Philippe, sought her advice and granted a great deal as a result of her requests and recommendations.  

To this enumeration of sovereigns could be added the names of lesser luminaries who also generously shared their wealth and influence with Sister Rosalie. Among them was Madame de La Villette, Reine-Philiberte de Varicourt, the adopted daughter of Voltaire, who had protected and assisted Father Emery during the Revolution of 1789, and, according to Sister Saillard, “came so often to bring alms that the horses headed to the house on their own.... The Duchess of Narbonne was also a generous visitor.”

There were also simple visitors who came to her, drawn to her little parlor by her reputation and charity. Again, it was Sister Tissot who elaborated on this:

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614 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 141.
615 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 63.
...[God] directed thousands of charitable souls from all classes and every political sector of society to His servant's humble dwelling. Their abundant donations were put into the little desk in our Mother's office. It was filled and emptied without measure. She drew from it without counting.  

Sister Rosalie's desk.  
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris.  
Courtesy of Sister Francine Brown, D.C.

In his discourse, delivered on the occasion of the dedication of a bust of Sister Rosalie to be placed in an assembly room of the town hall of the XIIth arrondissement, the Mayor, Monsieur Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, spoke of Sister Rosalie's extraordinary magnetism:

In the house of charity of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, there was a Sister well known for her gentleness and charity among the poor and her sound advice and Christian humility among the rich and worldly.

She joined a natural dignity in her language and manner to an understanding of life, something that is dead letter for the more experienced but is always

^Ibid., 62-63.
an open book to select spirits. Her kind welcome encouraged confidences. Her discretion insured them. She pleased the lowly by her simplicity filled with charm. The great were comfortable with her because of her reserve which awaited their confidences without pushing for or forcing them.\footnote{\textsuperscript{617}}

The evidence shows that Sister Rosalie's life of service to those who were poor in the Mouffetard district reflected that of the founders. Without their close collaboration with the wealthy and influential of their day, Vincentian works would never have become what they were. Notwithstanding, this resemblance did not necessarily shield Sister Rosalie from disapproval. In her testimony, Sister Costalin, her companion at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois from 1845 until her superior's death in 1856, recounts one incident involving the displeasure of major superiors with Sister Rosalie; a displeasure most likely based on a complaint from a Daughter of Charity of her own house about her close relationship with the rich. She recalls:

One summer day, Sister Assistant sent word that [Sister Rosalie] was to come to the Motherhouse. At [a meeting of] the Council, it had been all but decided that she would be removed [as superior of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois]. Sister Rosalie left immediately [for the Motherhouse] without saying a word to her companions. When she arrived, the Sister Assistant said, without preamble, “Sister Rendu, you are to stay here.” That was all.\footnote{\textsuperscript{618}}

Desmet quotes Sister Costalin's account of this episode textually. However, without indicating it, he inserts a sentence which does not appear in her testimony but which surely reflects her view of the suffering the incident caused Sister Rosalie, and her assessment of the actions of superiors. He comments, “Our good God often tries His saints [this way] and superiors frequently act as He does.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{619}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{617}} “Discours de M. Adrien Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, maire du XIIe arrondissement, à l'inauguration du buste de sœur Rosalie dans la salle de la Mairie, lundi, 22 décembre 1856,” \textit{Inauguration du buste de sœur Rosalie} (Paris: 1856).
\footnote{\textsuperscript{618}} Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, \textit{Rendu, Positio; Sommaire}, 45.
\footnote{\textsuperscript{619}} Desmet, \textit{Sœur Rosalie}, 94.
Sister Rosalie remained at the Motherhouse for about 10 days, quietly and humbly helping where she could. During this time, she had no further direct contact with her superiors. Meanwhile, a steady stream of administrators, poor persons, the mighty and the lowly, came to the parlor of the Motherhouse in an effort to persuade these same superiors to send her back to the Mouffetard district. They also requested to see her, but Sister Rosalie herself refused, judging that it would serve no worthwhile purpose.

Finally, the Sister Assistant asked Sister Rosalie if she would like to explain her actions to the Superioress General. She responded quite simply, “I will see her when she sends for me to place me. There is nothing to say. For the time being I have only to obey.”

Then, the day came when the Superioress General sent for her. Evidently, she and her Council had determined to send Sister Rosalie back to rue de l’Épee-de-Bois and leave her as Sister Servant of the house. We have no way of knowing to what extent the pleas of those who came to the Motherhouse to advocate for Sister Rosalie’s return entered into this decision. However, the Superioress General’s words in sending her back to the Mouffetard district appear to manifest a decision made under pressure that we are certain did not come from Sister Rosalie. Sister Costalin tells us that when Sister Rosalie arrived at the Superioress General’s office, the latter did not look up at her but continued writing, saying only, “Sister Rendu, go home.” Then she added... “Sister Rendu, go back home. You are an annoyance for us here.”

It is not difficult to imagine how devastated Sister Rosalie must have been given her “extreme sensitivity” and respect for and loyalty to her superiors. Nonetheless, she joyfully returned to rue de l’Épee-de-Bois and never said a word about the episode to anyone. Sister Costalin undoubtedly learned of this incident from a third party. Sister Rosalie’s “beloved poor,” her sister companions, the administrators of the Bureau of Public Assistance, and her friends and collaborators also rejoiced. The “Apostle of the Mouffetard district” had returned to her “diocese,” the Daughter of Charity to her little community of sister companions.

As for her accuser, nothing in Sister Rosalie’s comportment would ever reveal who it was. Life in the little house on rue de l’Épee-de-Bois continued as it had been before this painful incident.

\[620\] Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 45.
\[621\] Ibid.
In addition to the reproof of the Superioress General, this episode also involved a member of the General Council, namely, the Assistant. However, we do not know if she was a simple intermediary or if she agreed with the criticism. Nonetheless, her comportment toward Sister Rosalie showed no understanding of or compassion for her at this distressing time in her life.

There is another incident involving Sister Rosalie and a member of the General Council, this time the Treasurer. We do not know what was behind the disapproval, but it was likely Sister Rosalie’s relations with the rich and her practice of receiving money with one hand and immediately giving it to a person who had come to her in distress with the other. This incident occurred late in Sister Rosalie’s life so she most probably never knew about it and therefore did not suffer from it.

There is a letter to Sister Rosalie (one of the few that have been preserved), from the then Superioress General, Sister Elisabeth Montcellet (1851-1857 and 1860-1866), dated 3 November 1853, which must have consoled her given her difficulties dealing with this level of the government of the Company. It also illustrates the ambivalence of major superiors in her regard. In Chapter XI, we spoke of the close collaboration between Sister Rosalie and three successive Superioressses General, Sister Marie Boulet (1833-1839), Sister Marie Carrère (1839-1845), and Sister Marie Mazin (1845-1851), for the placement of
Daughters of Charity at Bon-Sauveur of Caen. While Sister Rosalie placed no one at Caen after 1849, the letter is another request from a major superior for assistance in placing a woman “in keeping with her desires and means.”

The letter contains the usual polite formulas used in such correspondence of the time. However, there is a brief phrase that seems to depart a bit from the norm. The Superioress General writes, “I express my sincere gratitude to you in advance while assuring you and your dear family once again of my affectionate and devoted sentiments, with which I am without reserve, in the love of Jesus and Mary Immaculate, my very dear Sister, your very humble servant and very affectionate Sister...”

The phrase, “with which I am without reserve,” may simply be yet another polite formula. Even so, it may also be a word of encouragement to a sister who experienced little from this level of government in the Company. Be that as it may, Sister Montcellet was asking Sister Rosalie to use her contacts with the rich to find a suitable placement for the woman in question. The letter was hand delivered. We do not know what Sister Rosalie might have been doing when she received it. However, she stops and responds to the Superioress General’s request immediately. On the same letter, dated the same day, she writes to Madame Méginateaud, at 3, rue Ventadour, asking her to accept the woman into her household:

I am sending you a maid about whom I have good information. Please read what our Mother General wrote to me about her. If you are pleased with her, I think that she will be a good addition.

I am, with all my heart,
Your devoted and grateful...

As we will see, by the time this letter was written, we begin to approach the final two years of Sister Rosalie’s life, years marked by her failing health and the loss of her sight. Nonetheless, she responded

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622 Letter of Sister Elisabeth Montcellet to Sister Rosalie, 3 November 1853, AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Le 268.
623 Ibid.
624 Letter of Sister Rosalie to Madame Méginateaud, 3 November 1853, on Letter of Sister Elisabeth Montcellet to Sister Rosalie, 3 November 1853.
promptly and graciously to yet another request for assistance from the general level of the Company. There is not the slightest hint of bitterness at being asked to use the very contacts that had been the basis of criticism against her. Here Sister Rosalie demonstrates what Sister Costalin said of her respect for her superiors and desire to be of service to them:

...Her devotion to Superiors was limitless and was equaled only by her discretion.... She considered herself blessed to be able to lighten their burdens or [alleviate] their affectionate concerns. She spared nothing [in trying] to procure the requested result for one of their protégés.625

Despite occasional protests reaching them about Sister Rosalie's relationship with the rich and powerful, it was normal for the superiors of the Daughters of Charity to turn to her for help when her network of contacts would produce a favorable result in important and delicate matters. In this they were following the example of others from all levels of society, both ecclesiastical and civil. As we have seen with Bon-Sauveur of Caen, she was the person to whom one turned in need. There is, however, a rather amusing detail in Sister Saillard's testimony that indicates that Sister Rosalie was called upon to do all types of things which, it appears, at least here, someone else could easily have done. Sister Saillard had been a postulant at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois in 1851-1852. From 22 April to 13 November 1852, she was a novice in the seminary of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity. She recalls, "I had the happiness of seeing Sister Rosalie from time to time when she came with a baby from the Day Nursery to vaccinate the young sisters. She waited respectfully and humbly at the door of the office of the venerable Sister Bouchepot [the Seminary Directress], who considered her a saint."626 Surely there was a sister with more medical background than Sister Rosalie who could have performed this task. But there was a need and, almost out of habit, superiors turned to her. And she always responded.

Thus far, we have seen that, other than her difficulties with the Superior General relating to her actions during the revolutions

625 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 46.
626 Ibid., 66.
of 1830 and 1848 and their aftermath, Sister Rosalie’s sometimes strained relations with her superiors were with women superiors of the Daughters of Charity. However, “since its origin, the Company, in conformity with the will of Saint Louise, has recognized and accepted the authority of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, the successor of Saint Vincent de Paul.” We have already discussed in Chapter IV the question of the jurisdiction of the Superior General over the Company of the Daughters of Charity in relation to the re-establishment of the Company after its suppression in 1793. It suffices to say here that, by 1840, it was a long-established principle in the government of the Daughters of Charity. Therefore, when Sister Rosalie entered the fray surrounding what has come to be known as “The Nozo Affair,” she was risking not only the wrath of the Superior General, Jean-Baptiste-Rigobert Nozo, C.M. (1835-1842), but more particularly what would turn out to be the lasting enmity of the then Procurator General and Father Nozo’s eventual successor, Father Étienne.

From the outset it must be pointed out that this “affair” was both complex and prolonged. It has also been thoroughly recounted and studied. Father Étienne himself dealt with it in his Notice sur le rétablissement de la Congrégation de la Mission après la Révolution de 1789. Édouard Rosset, C.M., does likewise in his 1881 biography of Father Étienne, Vie de Monsieur Étienne. Pierre Coste, C.M., returns to it in his 1929 history of the Vincentian Community, La Congrégation de la Mission, dite de Saint-Lazare. In 2001, Edward Udovic, C.M., published his Jean-Baptiste Étienne and the Vincentian Revival. In it he devoted 109 pages (143-252) to a critical examination of this subject and the circumstances surrounding it. He challenged both Father Étienne and Father Rosset on inaccuracies revealed by his re-examination of the pertinent documents and events. However, other than in a note, none of these Vincentian scholars spoke of Sister Rosalie’s involvement in the matter. Therefore, we shall limit our present consideration to that, while, at the same time, providing some essential, albeit limited, background information.

Our knowledge of Sister Rosalie’s role in this affair is based on three letters she sent to Monseigneur Affre, the newly appointed Archbishop of Paris, between 30 July and 17 August 1840, and the

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testimonies of Sister Costalin and Sister Saillard. The broad facts are that Dominique Salhorgne, C.M., resigned as Superior General, for reasons of age and health, at the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in May 1835. The question was who would succeed him. Amable-Ferdinand-Joseph Bailly, C.M., enjoyed a certain amount of popularity with the delegates, but he appears to have withdrawn his name as he did not want to leave Amiens where he was director of the major seminary, vicar general of the diocese, and visitor (provincial superior) for Picardy. This left Father Nozo and perhaps Father Étienne. On 20 August 1835, Jean-Baptiste Nozo was elected Superior General, but not by one vote as Father Étienne alleged. The Vincentian scholar, John E. Rybolt, C.M., in his soon to be published *History of the Congregation of the Mission*, clarified the outcome of the vote:

His election must have been a foregone conclusion, since he received sixteen votes. The remaining ones were divided up among the elderly [Pierre] Le Go with four; Salhorgne (who had just resigned), two; [Juan] Roca, visitor of Spain, one; [Filippo] Girodi, an Italian from the province of Lombardy, one; and

Jean-Baptiste Nozo, C.M.
Superior General – 1835-1842.
Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris
Ferdinand Bailly, two. The total was twenty-six, since Salhorgne was absent, alleging illness, and [the Spanish quasi-Delegate Miguel] Gros and Étienne apparently did not vote.628

Clearly Father Nozo had the support of his confreres at the beginning, but this was destined to change once he was in a position of power. Difficulties with his council began when he started acting independently of them. Consequently he often found himself challenged by his Assistants, Fathers Étienne, Aladel, Le Go, and Jean Grappin. Pasquale Fiorillo, the Italian Assistant, seems to have maintained his distance from any controversy. Tensions were high even before Father Nozo returned to Paris in 1838 after a visit to Rome and began to confront the case of Father Bailly. There was a double source of contention, the validity of Father Bailly’s vows and his financial management. Both these allegations had some supporting evidence. Moreover, the General Council, despite differences with the Superior General in other matters, supported Father Nozo in this instance.

The question of the date of Ferdinand Bailly’s vows was of critical importance as the official date of membership in the Congregation of the Mission, during that era, corresponded to the date of pronouncing vows. Father Bailly pronounced his vows on 16 September 1819. Thus, his membership in the Congregation dated from that day if his vows were valid. Why would they not be?

The response is to be found in the complex situation existing at the time in the Congregation of the Mission. Upon the death of the Superior General, Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde (1788-1800), in 1800, the Congregation of the Mission, because of its lack of legal status in France, could not convene a General Assembly to elect his successor. Until this could occur, governance devolved on vicars general, both French and Italian simultaneously. There were five French vicars general between 1800 and the election of Pierre-Joseph de Wailly as Superior General (1827-1828) in 1827. The last of the French vicars general was Charles-Vincent de Paul Cathelin Boujad (1819-1827). The drama for Father Bailly and a handful of other Vincentian priests was that they petitioned and received authorization to pronounce

their vows from Father Boujard between the time he was elected by the French confreres at an assembly held on 13 May 1819 and his confirmation months later by the Vatican. Did he have the authority during this period of admitting candidates to vows?

To address this ambiguity, Father Nozo turned to the Vatican for a decision. John Rybolt wrote concerning the result of this intervention:

...Armed with the papal rescript, Nozo was able to remove the doubt, and the confreres in question apparently requested permission to renew their vows. It appears that Bailly did not make this request, but in any case, he would have been refused. Possibly he understood his situation and decided not to pursue the matter. One of the many briefs stated that Bailly was not permitted to renew his vows, but no evidence for this assertion exists.

630 Rybolt, History of the Congregation.
The validity of Ferdinand Bailly's vows was not the only question stirring up concern at the general level of the Congregation. Indeed, his situation could have been resolved as it was for the other Vincentian priests whom Father Boujard authorized to pronounce their vows. However, Father Bailly's financial maneuvers and inappropriate loans, his incomplete and sometimes befuddling reports, and his numerous failures altogether to submit accounts were alarming. Father Grappin's investigation into the matter appeared to support a judgment of financial malfeasance. This, combined with the question of the validity of Father Bailly's vows and his refusal to seek permission to renew them, led the Superior General and his Council to take action against him. According to Rybolt:

...matters moved quickly. In a letter from Nozo to Bailly, dated 29 August 1838, the vows of Ferdinand Bailly were recognized and declared null. This expression was ambiguous. For Nozo it meant that although Bailly had taken vows, even if of doubtful validity, they were declared henceforth to be null or without effect. . . . [The letter] accompanied his notice of dismissal, and spoke of a dispensation from his vows. Bailly, however, read the expression as meaning that his vows had always been null and, in that sense, he would later demand salary for the years he had worked as an employee of the Congregation beginning in 1807, when he claimed he entered. Nozo and his council would counter that he became a member only on 16 September 1819, the day he took vows.631

Following his dismissal, Ferdinand Bailly sued for wages for his services, alleging that if his vows were invalid, he had never been a member of the Congregation and should therefore be compensated.

631 Ibid.
Note: Rybolt supplies the following documentation to support his conclusions: “Nozo to Bailly,” reprinted in Précis pour M. Aimable-Ferdinand Bailly... contre M. Jean-Baptiste Nozo, undated legal brief, ACMP, “Affaire Bailly-Nozo,” unnumbered folder at liasse 39; also reprinted in Affaire Bailly contre Nozo, ...conclusions de M. de Charancey, p. 8-9; undated legal brief, 39 pp., and in other briefs.
The whole matter became bitter and public. Bailly offered to accept arbitration but Father Nozo refused. This decision would ultimately lead to his downfall. Ferdinand Bailly eventually won the judgment and the Superior General was ordered to pay 50,728.57 francs plus 39,150 francs for the years he had been in Amiens, 1807-1838.

Father Nozo reluctantly reported the unfavorable court ruling to his General Council and to the Vincentian local superiors in France. He also presented his side of the affair to Monseigneur Affre, whose support he hoped to have in the event of an appeal.

The council then met to determine what to do next as they felt the matter affected the entire Congregation and not just the Superior General. Although there was reluctance within the General Council to proceed with an appeal, in the end the Assistants acquiesced to Father Nozo's entreaties. Father Étienne and Father Aladel drafted the text. Unfortunately, Father Nozo saw this as vindication of his actions and had 3,000 copies printed and distributed in the dioceses of France. The appeal was rejected in June 1840. However, it almost immediately led to another suit, one that would prove to be even more acrimonious and create wider public scandal.

In the briefs prepared by attorneys, mention was made of an unauthorized loan which Father Bailly was accused of making, from Congregation funds, to his brother Emmanuel, the same Emmanuel who was president of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul from its origin. Emmanuel claimed that the publication of the brief, which was distributed even in Pas-de-Calais where the Bailly family originated, had defamed his family and done irreparable harm to his good name. He demanded monetary damages from the Congregation of the Mission. Ironically enough, the latter were investors in L'Univers religieux, which had merged with La Tribune Catholique in 1836, and employed Emmanuel as publisher at least until 1839.

The three letters of Sister Rosalie to Archbishop Affre dealt with the defamation suit brought by "Bailly, publisher," as she refers to him in this correspondence, that is Emmanuel Bailly, rather than with his older brother Ferdinand's suit, although both were occasions of wide public scandal which Sister Rosalie sought to alleviate.

Monseigneur Affre had been appointed Archbishop of Paris only in January 1840. Thus, at the time of her first letter, 30 July 1840, Sister Rosalie had no long-standing working relationship with him as she had had with his predecessor, Monseigneur de Quélen. Notwithstanding, she was 55 years of age and reaching the pinnacle
of her influence. Thus, she did not hesitate to use it to try to preserve the Congregation of the Mission from scandal. More astounding yet, Monseigneur Affre heeded her advice.

This first letter seems to indicate that Sister Rosalie had previously either written or spoken to the archbishop requesting his intervention as an arbitrator in the on-going dispute. She wrote:

I need to speak to you of the gratitude and respectful confidence which penetrates my heart because of your receptivity to my request concerning our Vincentian priests. You will retain for this Congregation the honor and reputation that the work of Vincent de Paul merits.

You will bring an end to the scandal that afflicts your truly pastoral and paternal heart. To bring about peace, which has been disturbed by the differences between the two interested parties, is an act worthy of you and will auger well for your episcopacy.

You will begin by an act of the highest importance. You will restore life to the children of Saint Vincent, friend of the blessed Founder of our esteemed Sulpicians [Jean-Jacques Olier], your fathers and friends.\footnote{Monseigneur Affre had studied for the priesthood at Saint-Sulpice and later entered the Sulpicians, with whom Sister Rosalie had a close relationship, beginning with her godfather, Father Emery, Superior General at the time of her entrance into the Daughters of Charity in 1802.}

Yes, Monseigneur, my heart is filled with gratitude and respect for you. I am so [deeply] touched... I cannot prevent myself from writing [to express this] although my awareness of your retreat should have stopped me. Excuse my indiscretion \textit{due to my}
motive and accept, Monseigneur, the assurance of my profound esteem in which I have the honor to be,

Your Eminence’s very humble daughter,

Sister Rosalie

Before continuing, some remarks about this letter, as well as the other two, are in order. While the sentiments expressed are clearly Sister Rosalie’s, the style indicates a writer more accustomed to correspondence with the highest levels of society. All the polite formulas are correctly expressed. As pointed out earlier, many of Sister Rosalie’s letters were written for her by others. While she expressed herself with a certain degree of elegance, spelling was beyond her. She had the humility and the simplicity to request assistance in this area. The scribe here was most likely Armand de Melun. Cyprien Loppe could also have written them; however, he was no longer in Paris whereas Melun met with Sister Rosalie on a weekly basis. She probably shared her concerns about the scandal with him and asked his assistance in writing to the archbishop.

Monseigneur Affre knew Sister Rosalie mostly through reputation; nonetheless, she signed all three letters as she signed all her correspondence simply, “Sister Rosalie.” Such was her renown that even the avenue in Paris named in her honor is “Avenue de la Soeur Rosalie.” There was no confusion in anyone’s mind as to who she was.

Paris street sign indicating avenue named in honor of Sister Rosalie.

Courtesy of Sister Marie-Geneviève Roux, D.C.

Note: In the Positio he prepared, page 209, Father Beaudoin indicates the recipient of these three letters as Monseigneur de Quelen. In the text, page 204, however, he speaks of them as written to Monseigneur Affre. The latter was indeed the recipient.
While protesting that she did not want to inconvenience the archbishop, Sister Rosalie wrote again on 13 August urging him "to convince Monsieur Bailly to withdraw his complaint so that Monsieur Nozo will not be obliged to appear in criminal court." She then told Monseigneur Affre that he had to obtain a written promise from Bailly to do so and forward it to the presiding magistrate. She even supplied the correct address.\(^634\)

Sister Rosalie wrote to the archbishop again just four days later, on 17 August 1840. The letter contains some revealing points. First, she once again excused herself for intervening, if not interfering, in this delicate matter, as she often said, "because of the motives" that urged her on. Second, she reminded the archbishop that he was aware of these motives so she considered it her "duty to keep him updated on everything concerning the affair between Monsieur Nozo and Monsieur Bailly, publisher." Third, she had visited Monseigneur Affre about the matter sometime in the intervening three days as she wrote, "after leaving Your Eminence, I went to see Monsieur Aladel, Monsieur Nozo's Assistant, who said he had hastened to send the document you drew up to Monsieur Nozo in Amiens." Thus, in this particular matter, she was an intermediary and in direct contact with the Vincentian General Council. Therefore, the long-lasting disapproval of Sister Rosalie on the part of the Congregation of the Mission does not seem to have its roots in the affair of Monsieur Bailly, publisher, versus Monsieur Nozo.

It might also be good to recall again here Father Étienne's role in the re-establishment of the Ladies of Charity, which likewise occurred in 1840. The Ladies were sent, with Archbishop Affre's approval, to the parish of Saint-Médard and placed under the guidance of Sister Rosalie. Her reports on their activities were addressed to Father Étienne who had also become the spiritual director of the group. This situation is another illustration of the ambivalence of superiors of both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission with regard to Sister Rosalie's comportment. They never ordered her to terminate her relationship with the rich and powerful, nor did they remove her as superior of the house on rue de l'Épée-de-Bois. Rather they turned to her and her vast network of charity whenever the good

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\(^634\) Letter of Sister Rosalie to Denis-Auguste Affre, 13 August 1840, Original AAP: 4 R 17.

Note: Sister Rosalie's three letters to Monseigneur Affre are all under the same call number at the Archdiocesan Archives in Paris.
of those who were poor, the Daughters of Charity or the Congregation of the Mission called for it.

Fourth, while all this was going on, Sister Rosalie was in communication with Monsieur Bailly, publisher. This is not surprising since, as we have seen in Chapter X concerning the founding of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, both Emmanuel Bailly and his wife were friends and collaborators of Sister Rosalie. Thus, her remarks are somewhat unexpected. At first she spoke of her friend in a conciliatory manner pointing out that, “Monsieur Bailly has told [her] on several occasions that he will abide by your Eminence’s decision.” However, she then warned the archbishop, “I am taking the liberty, Monseigneur, of begging you to be wary of Monsieur Bailly’s allegations. For the most part, they are false and I am certain that he is distorting your thoughts with regard to this affair.” Sister Rosalie then stated the desired outcome as she saw it, “It is essential that the Vincentian Congregation owe the conclusion of this affair to the spontaneous movement of your truly pastoral heart and that Monsieur Bailly be convinced that he has no further recourse.” She went on to express her confidence in Monseigneur Affre’s willingness and ability to resolve the matter as “all persons of good will wanted.”

Father Nozo lost the defamation case but the archbishop did intervene. In the presence of Archbishop Affre, the Superior General was obliged to apologize to Emmanuel Bailly, withdraw the brief from circulation, and delete the offending passage.

While this supposedly ended the matter, the case involving Ferdinand Bailly was far from over. Both parties eventually agreed to arbitration. The outcome would prove disastrous for Bailly who, in the end, would lose on nearly all counts and be obliged to return the money already awarded. In the interim the matter was very public. Sister Costalin revealed just how public it was when she recalled:

The suit continued and the public was captivated. Every day, Sister Rosalie took it upon herself to get newspaper clippings before the [papers] came out. [Thus], the community had time to prepare its response and be on the lookout for the traps set for it.

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635 Letter of Sister Rosalie to Denis-Auguste Affre, 17 August 1840, Original AAP: 4 R 17.
636 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 43.
Meanwhile, Father Nozo found himself the object of accusations of similar financial malfeasance. His ill-advised investments and loans destroyed his credibility, threatened the solvency of the Congregation of the Mission, and deepened the rift between the Superior General and his Council. It was at this point that Sister Rosalie once again made the move to intervene directly with Monseigneur Affre. It was a decision she made "from the motive" of protecting the Vincentian family from further scandal. While she would ultimately prevail, it would be at high personal cost. Her actions would be a source of long-term suffering for her, and would affect the perception the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity had of her well beyond her death. Sister Saillard was obviously referring to this matter when she testified:

[Sister Rosalie's] soul was too pleasing to Our Lord for her not to be purified by suffering. During the last years of her life, she endured a trial that was even more painful for her heart as she had greater veneration for our Most Honored Superiors and a deeper attachment to the Community. [Thus], her best intentions were misinterpreted. Far from defending herself, she remained silent leaving the task of revealing the truth to Our Lord.

Then, in Sister Rosalie's eyes, the whole affair reached the crisis stage. Apparently the new archbishop had grown weary of all the infighting between Father Nozo and his Council as well as the resultant scandal in his diocese. Therefore, he decided to take action against the Vincentian General Council, except the Italian Assistant, Father Fiorillo. According to Sister Costalin, Sister Rosalie learned from a "reliable source" that Monseigneur Affre was going to pass a sentence of interdict against Fathers Étienne, Aladel, Le Go, and Grappin for their insubordination to their superior. This interdiction would mean they could no longer say mass or administer the sacraments. Without hesitation and without measuring what it might cost her personally she intervened, and this time dramatically.

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637 Ibid., 66.
638 Ibid., 43.
According to Sister Costalin, Sister Rosalie rushed to the archbishop's residence, threw herself at his feet, begged him to reconsider, and cast the interdiction into the fire. When the archbishop urged her to rise from her knees, she responded, "No, Monseigneur, I will not get up until I have obtained the grace that I am going to ask of you."  

Sister Rosalie remained kneeling during the "very animated debate" that followed. Archbishop Affre finally yielded to her "humble supplication." He kindly said to her, "Get up from your knees, Sister, and remember that it is only because of your entreaties that I have acquiesced." He then issued a warning, "Burn it yourself and remember that I am holding you responsible before the judgment seat of God for the action you are causing me to take."  

The outcome of this intervention is clear. The Congregation of the Mission was spared the disgrace and scandal that would have inevitably followed an order of interdiction in so public a matter. Moreover, it was evident to all who were aware of the threat of interdiction that those involved, and the Congregation as a whole, owed a great debt of gratitude to Sister Rosalie. Nevertheless, no such gratitude was forthcoming. On the contrary, as a result of her involvement in a delicate situation that Father Étienne and the other Assistants considered an internal community matter, and one of which they did not want to be reminded, Sister Rosalie earned their enduring animosity. Sister Costalin was outspoken on this and talked about it twice in her testimony, once in 1893 and again in 1897. Time had not healed her wounds. The bitterness was apparent. In 1893, she wrote:

The Community has remained mute concerning the past of the person who preserved it from the greatest harm, confusion, shame, and scandal by persuading Monseigneur Affre (at whose feet she remained for a fairly long time) to throw the interdiction he had prepared against Monsieur Étienne, Monsieur Aladel, and others into the fire.  

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\[639\] Ibid.  
\[640\] Ibid.  
\[641\] Ibid., 42.  
\[642\] Ibid.
Sister Rosalie's intervention had another, surely unintended, outcome. It was never her intention to defend Father Nozo either here or in the Emmanuel Bailly suit. However, it could have appeared that way to the parties involved, thus securing their lasting displeasure.

Sister Costalin returned to the subject in 1897:

I am adding that they have probably forgotten to record this incident in the dossier of the affair that must be located in the archives at Saint-Lazare, as there was only one Vincentian [priest] at Sister Rosalie's funeral. Besides, he told me that he came without telling anyone because he owed so much to Mother Rendu. It was Monsieur Marion.\(^ {643} \)

In 1935, Maurice Collard, C.M., presented written testimony concerning the possible reasons for Sister Rosalie's difficulties with superiors of the Congregation of the Mission. We have already referred to this text in Chapter IX, when dealing with Sister Rosalie's comportment during and after the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. It is Father Beaudoin's introduction to this testimony that is of interest to

\(^ {643} \) Ibid., 43.
us here. He stated that, in 1928, Father Collard was named Director of the Work of Blessed Perboyre and of the Bulletin des Missions des Lazaristes et des Filles de la Charité. He remained in this position until his death in 1950. It was during this time that he became interested in Sister Rosalie’s Cause and sought to discover the reasons behind her difficulties with the Congregation of the Mission. The text presented for the Cause supposedly begins by enumerating some of the underlying reasons for Sister Rosalie’s problems. However, both the beginning and the end of the text have been removed. Father Beaudoin conjectures that these two sections dealt with the “Nozo Affair” and “it was probably this [the Congregation] wanted to conceal.” Father Beaudoin concludes by saying that Sister Rosalie’s difficulties were only superficial, and examining them as he did in his text only proves “that, for Sister Rosalie, the only thing that mattered was fraternal charity.”

This is an apt conclusion for our examination of the voices raised to criticize Sister Rosalie for her high visibility, her relationship with the rich and powerful, and her practice of giving away funds to persons in need almost as soon as she received them. Rather than tarnish her reputation, such criticism served to reveal an extraordinary humility that prevented her from ever seeking to defend or justify herself; (there was one occasion when she knelt before Father Étienne to ask his pardon for having offended him, though it most likely should have been the other way around); her quiet courage that preserved her loyalty to her superiors and forbade any criticism of them; her refusal to be vindictive toward those who may have been the source of blame directed toward her; her willingness to respond promptly and amiably to any request from her superiors even when they were asking her to have recourse to her wealthy collaborators, precisely the comportment for which she was being criticized; her fortitude in acting always because of the motive, that is for Jesus Christ loved and served in all those who were poor; in her collaborators be they rich or poor, powerful or lowly; and in a very special way, in the Daughters of Charity with whom she shared her community life and apostolic work, and whom as Sister Servant she formed “to give themselves totally to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor.” We will now turn to the voices of respect, admiration, and

641 Ibid., 77-78.
love rising from those who knew her best, her sister companions of
the little house on rue de l’Épee-de-Bois.

Voices of love, respect, and admiration for Sister Rosalie. Sister
Rosalie spent her entire life as a Daughter of Charity (1802-1856) in
what was essentially one house, rue des Francs-Bourgeois-Saint-
Marcel, which was later transferred to rue de l’Épee-de-Bois. From
the age of 29 (1815-1856), she was the local superior. So much has
been said of her extraordinary service to persons in need that it is
essential to look more closely at Sister Rosalie as a sister companion
and as the one called upon to safeguard the spirit of Saint Vincent and
Saint Louise in the sisters’ house. To know more about this, we will
turn mostly to her former companions, but also to collaborators who
had close contact not only with Sister Rosalie but with the sisters of the
house, and to circumstances that reveal Sister Rosalie as a “Daughter
of Charity among her sisters.”

While speaking of the criticism sometimes leveled at Sister
Rosalie and the resultant difficulties with her superiors, we pointed
out the seeming ambivalence in their dealings with her. The fact that
they left her as Sister Servant in the same house for 41 years is an
indication of a level of confidence in her. More striking, however, is
the composition of the house itself over the course of these years. The
records are incomplete and there are some obvious discrepancies.
Notwithstanding, the information available strongly indicates that
rue de l’Épee-de-Bois was what is known in religious congregations as
“a house of formation.” Sister Marie Regnault, archivist for a time at
the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, compiled a list of sisters
who were postulants under the guidance of Sister Rosalie between
1833 and 1856. She names 22. Among them, we find Sister Saillard,
whose testimony has provided valuable insights into Sister Rosalie
and her companions. Sister Regnault also composed a list of sisters
whom Sister Rosalie prepared to pronounce their vows for the first
time. There are 18. Among them are Sister Costaline and Sister Tissot
who, as we have seen, were also witnesses for Sister Rosalie’s Cause of
Beatification and were still with her at the time of her death.645

When, after two years of increasingly frail health and
blindness, Sister Rosalie died in February 1856, there were 12 sisters in
the house, including Sister Rosalie herself. Of the remaining 11 sisters,
nine were under ten years vocation, thus still in initial formation. Of

645 Registres des entrées 1801-1855, AFCP.
this number, six were "under vows" that is, under five years vocation, the time at which the Daughters of Charity pronounce their vows for the first time. These young sisters had been members of the Company for one year (1), 15 months (1), 18 months (1), two and one-half years (1), three years (1), and four years (1).

Thus, the number of postulants, young sisters preparing to pronounce vows for the first time, and sisters under ten years vocation placed with Sister Rosalie during this timeframe is significant. While the Daughters of Charity, especially after 1830, were experiencing a period of unprecedented growth in new vocations, formation of recent arrivals was a high priority as these young people are any congregation's most precious resource. A religious community's future and mission depend on them.

The responsibility for formation of the postulants and young sisters devolved on the Sister Servant. Moreover, while there were provinces in the Company of the Daughters of Charity by this era, they were all outside of France. The houses of France depended directly on the Motherhouse, and the placement of sisters, as well as postulants, was the prerogative of the Superioress General and her Council. This reality is perhaps the most telling proof that, while situations may have occasionally caused them to act otherwise, the women superiors, at least, trusted and respected Sister Rosalie as a woman who could not only teach the Rule and spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise but, more importantly, could model the Daughter of Charity "totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor" to young women as they took their early steps in the Company. Had they thought otherwise, they never would have placed them with her during their formative years.

We have spoken throughout this text, especially in Chapter VII, of Sister Rosalie's relationship with her companions. We will not repeat all that here but rather concentrate on her as Sister Servant, the attributes she brought to this office, and the response of others to her in her role as local superior and formator.

Perhaps the essential attribute Sister Rosalie brought to her responsibility as Sister Servant was what Eugène Rendu spoke of as her "infinite tenderness," which was a by-product of her "extreme sensitivity." This tenderness characterized her love for her "beloved

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646 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio, 181.
647 Eugène Rendu, in Messager de la Charité, no. 102 (16 February 1856).
poor,” her collaborators and friends, and most particularly, her sister companions. Their fatigue or illness, joys and sorrows, successes and difficulties touched her deeply. Melun shared what the sisters told him happened when one of Sister Rosalie’s companions fell ill:

As soon as a sister was ill or seemed even slightly indisposed, Sister Rosalie, who was so hard on herself, so mortified, began to worry. She forbade anything tiring or any physical exercise for the sick sister. If the sickness worsened, she wanted to spend all of her free time with the patient... and called forth all her resources of knowledge and affection to combat it.638

When one of Sister Rosalie’s companions died, she was inconsolable. Again, it was Melun, who must also have, on occasion, witnessed her grief, who described it, “The mention of [the deceased sister’s] name or the recollection of one of her words or actions caused her to burst into tears.”649 When a sister she had formed was transferred, she wept. The sisters realized that one of them would be leaving when they saw her sadness. She was always afraid of losing one of her companions to another house, so when there was some ceremony at the Motherhouse she could be heard to say, “Don’t go, Sister Mélanie. You are tall. They will notice you and think about you for some other service.”650 On one such occasion, she had a crisis of conscience, fearing too human an attachment. She revealed her fears to a confidant who responded, “Set your mind at rest. If you did not love your companions so much, you could not love the poor so greatly.”651

How did Sister Rosalie manifest this “infinite tenderness” toward her companions, be they in initial formation or the senior sisters of the house? Sister Rosalie’s leadership style is sometimes spoken of as “maternal.” Indeed, the sisters most often referred to her as “Our Mother.” Within religious congregations of women, this appellation was usually reserved to the Superioress General, though it was sometimes used for local superiors, particularly when they had

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638 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 201.
649 Ibid.
650 Ibid., 202.
651 Rendu, Messager de la Charité.
been at the head of both the community house and the apostolic work for a prolonged period of time. This was certainly the case of Sister Rosalie. Moreover, it was the title given her by her “beloved poor” of the Mouffetard district and many of her close collaborators. When her body was moved from the burial vault belonging to the sisters of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois to an individual gravesite nearer the entrance to Montparnasse Cemetery, the new stone was inscribed, “To our good mother Rosalie, her grateful friends, the rich and the poor.” For those who thus spoke of her and were the object of her maternal affection, the word connoted love, self-sacrifice, dedication, concern, in a word, the total gift of self to God and for others. In the early XXIst century, however, the term “maternal,” applied to persons in positions of authority, took on a pejorative meaning and conjures up very different images of infantilism, dependency, and blind obedience. Was Sister Rosalie able to treat her companions with maternal affection while avoiding, especially in the young, the risks it could entail?

The sisters of rue de l’Épée-de-Bois shared Sister Rosalie’s community life and apostolic ministry on a daily basis in a small house. As they worked with her, they were exposed to the same dangers. They lived in a house where fugitives were sheltered and where the wounded on both sides of the conflict were treated in the courtyard. They nursed cholera victims. Sister Rosalie taught them, by her example, the audacity charity demanded. She challenged them, and the postulants and young sisters matured very quickly. However, danger was not an everyday accompaniment of their service. They would learn from her the asceticism of the ordinary. She was called upon to form them for their lives as Daughters of Charity, which involved encouragement and support as well as fraternal correction.

Postulants were first placed at rue de l’Épée-de-Bois in 1830. Melun learned from the sisters of the house how their Sister Servant initiated them to their lives in community and in the service of those who were poor. He described how Sister Rosalie accompanied their first steps:

When [Sister Rosalie] herself was placed at the head of the little community, she brought all the power of her affection to her daughters. She was truly their mother. Those who arrived as postulants... were formed gently to the virtues of their holy vocation and to the love of sacrifice and obedience. As they
advanced in their formation, the work became more demanding; the life more austere. Nothing was spared to test their vocation, to help them to understand the arduous side, the aversions, everything that blocks the stray impulses of devotion and the caprices of charity. At the end of the trial period, the postulant’s soul was prepared for the mission and worthy of the honor of serving those who were poor. She had, above all, become their most devoted friend, as she had heard the Superior repeat unceasingly, “Love [the fact that the poor] love you. If you have nothing to give, give yourself.”

Among the postulants formed by Sister Rosalie, three stand out. Sister Alix-Françoise Dubouays de Cousbouc postulated at rue de l’Épée-de-Bois in 1841. After serving in an army field hospital in Constantinople, she founded the mission of the Daughters of Charity in Persia in 1857. Sister Françoise de Paul de Virieu was a postulant formed by Sister Rosalie in 1850. Later, she established the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland. Sister Saillard, of whom we have already spoken, began her testimony, written in 1900, by saying, “It is a great honor for me to speak briefly to you about Venerable Sister Rosalie, whose memory I have... preserved for 48 years.” Sister Saillard concluded her testimony thus:

I would have wanted... to make you aware of all the virtues practiced by Sister Rosalie, her love of work and her poverty that she loved so much. Of all the sums [of money] that passed through her hands, nothing was ever used for the house which always retained its character of simplicity and the greatest poverty. [To all this I would add] her obedience to our holy Rules and to our Most Honored Superiors; her love for the Company; and her respect and gratitude for the [Vincentian Priests and Brothers], the sons of Saint Vincent, who are responsible for

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652 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 200-201.
653 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 61.
communicating his spirit to us. However I do not
dare to continue an account that is already so long
but also very incomplete.\textsuperscript{654}

Sister Saillard's vivid memory of Sister Rosalie and her practice of
virtue is significant because her testimony was written in 1900, 44 years
after her Sister Servant's death. What is perhaps more meaningful is
the fact that Sister Saillard was Directress of the Seminary for 15 years.
Her instructions to the novices surely included examples drawn from
Sister Rosalie's life. As Sister Rosalie's formation of Armand de
Melun as servant and advocate for those who were poor extended her
influence to the framing of public social policy, so her formation of
postulants and young sisters, placed under her guidance, was woven
into the preparation of novices for their future lives as Daughters of
Charity.

While Sister Rosalie was deeply touched by the loss of a
companion, whether it be through a change of mission or death, this
does not mean that sorrow marked the community life she shared
with her sisters. Again, it is Sister Saillard who spoke of their joyful
times together:

After the times of prayer and service of those who
were poor, came periods of recreation that were always
pleasant and joyful. Each [sister] recounted the most
interesting things that had happened with the poor
or the children. Everyone took an interest in their
companions' service and rejoiced at the good they
accomplished in the midst of their duties. However,
evening recreation took on a special character. It
was the time to open the numerous letters that were
addressed to Sister Rosalie.\textsuperscript{655}

Sister Saillard provides examples of the content of the letters. Some
expressed gratitude. Others were requests for a replacement for a
lost horse; a letter of recommendation; even for a wife to be chosen
by Sister Rosalie. There were weighty confidences and complaints
as well. The sisters enjoyed the different styles of the letters. Once

\textsuperscript{654} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{655} Ibid., 65.
they had been shared... "they were distributed to the Sisters gathered around the table. Our good Mother dictated the responses to the happy secretaries who turned the envelopes so they could be used for the reply."\(^{656}\)

Mademoiselle Baccoffe, who frequently came to the house and collaborated with both Sister Rosalie and her companions, observed another essential attribute of Sister Rosalie's attitude toward her companions - respect. She said, "Here is this noble Daughter of Charity whose life was filled only with love of the poor. She was equally as good to her companions. She always spoke kindly of them."\(^{657}\)

Sister Rosalie also demonstrated this respect through the confidence she had in each of her companions, even the youngest and most inexperienced. Thus, she did not hesitate to send Sister Tissot, the youngest sister in vocation in the house at the time, to the most distant working class quarter of the Mouffetard district. When sending her out, she told her, "You will have the better part.... You are going to] the Cité Dorée, where all that is the most miserable in Paris is huddled. You meet many drunks there. Walk modestly and quickly without rushing. Ask all the children you meet if they are in school. There is much good to be done there. It is the true place for a Daughter of Charity."\(^{658}\)

So the young sister set out. One day she met a police officer who told her that she was imprudent to come alone to a quarter that harbored the worst sort of "rabble." He added that the police came as a group, and only to put them in prison. Upon returning home, Sister Angélique - the name Sister Rosalie gave Sister Tissot when she arrived at rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, in honor of a poor woman who had just died - told her Sister Servant of her encounter with the police. The following dialogue ensued:

You have nothing to fear, my daughter. They are there to execute human justice; you are there to show the mercy of our Good God. You bring them assistance and consolation. You set them on the right path. Are we not blessed in the service of Our Lord?

\(^{656}\) Ibid., 65-66.
\(^{657}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{658}\) Ibid., 59.
But, Mother, only a small number want to understand.

Always do what you can, my daughter. Our Good God wants us to prepare the land, to sow, and to cultivate. He waters and brings forth fruit. Your efforts will not be lost. Grace will have its time. Pray much. Have the children from the shelter pray. Say a good word about God to your poor and give them your vouchers for meat or wood.659

Among the young sisters whom Sister Rosalie prepared to pronounce vows for the first time was Sister Lenain. She postulated in Arras and entered the Company in May 1836. She was first placed in Pamiers then, in 1838, she was sent to Saint-Médard where she pronounced vows for the first time in 1842. After a number of other placements, most often as Sister Servant, she died 7 June 1888.

In Sister Lenain’s *Notice*, a brief account of the life of some of the more notable sisters, written in the year following their death, we read of the profound affect the period of preparation for vows with Sister Rosalie had on her life as a Daughter of Charity:

At the House of Charity of the parish of Saint-Médard in Paris, as a companion of the Venerated Sister Rosalie Rendu, whose name has remained, even among non-believers, the synonym of devotedness and charity, Sister Lenain felt her esteem for a vocation, that could produce such souls, grow. From that time and for the rest of her life, Sister Rosalie remained, in her eyes, the perfect model of the Daughter of Charity, not because there was more... in her to attract the attention and esteem of the world so that she could, like our Blessed Father, reach many souls and relieve much misery, but because, in this exceptional situation, where ordinary virtue would have crumbled, she lived and died, like Saint Vincent, in humility, simplicity, and poverty. It was especially these virtues that [Sister

659 Ibid.
Rosalie] imprinted indelibly in the heart of Sister Lenain who was like soft wax in the hands of her Sister Servant. After nine years in the house of rue de l'Épée-de-Bois, where so many personages whose names were celebrated in the world [came to visit], what distinguished [Sister Rosalie] was humility, the practice and love of self effacement.\(^{66}\)

Many more examples of Sister Rosalie, the Sister Servant and formator, could be cited here. To this could be added mention of the nine young women she attracted and presented to the community as postulants between 1843 and 1853.\(^{661}\) We could mention numerous other citations that reflect Sister Costalin's view of Sister Rosalie's charity, "I believe that ever since Saint Vincent, no one has practiced this virtue to the same degree as Sister Rosalie. The misery of the poor was for her, as for our Holy Founder, her burden and her sorrow."\(^{662}\)

All this, however, would be redundant. We have listened to her critics. Nonetheless, their voices fade before the chorus raised in recognition of an extraordinary Daughter of Saint Vincent, whom major superiors had the confidence and wisdom to entrust with the formation of Daughters of Charity "totally given to God, in community, for the service of those who are poor." As with everything else that was asked of her, she did it lovingly and generously, in a word as a Daughter of Charity.

\(^{66}\) "Sister Lenain," Collection des Notices, 1889. AFCP.
\(^{661}\) Registre des Postulantes, AFCP.
\(^{662}\) Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 48.