CHAPTER III

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

INITIAL FORMATION

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

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

During the lifetime of the founders (1633-1660), until the Company was suppressed and the sisters dispersed by the Robespierre government in 1793, their growth was dramatic and spread beyond the frontiers of France. As mentioned above, the Revolution struck differently from province to province and some works continued throughout the Reign of Terror, as was the case with the Hospital of Gex, while others disappeared. In Paris, all the novices and sisters were obliged to return to their families where they remained until after the death of Robespierre on 28 July 1794. Then, little by little, they began to return and, once again, to take up the service of those in need in Paris and beyond. Their numbers, however, had drastically diminished either because of deaths, or the fact that a certain number of them could not or did not return. More significantly, perhaps, was
the fact that no young women were entering the Company to take their place. Yet another political change in France was to alter this.

By 1800, just as Jeanne-Marie Rendu was discerning her vocation, a young Corsican general, Napoléon Bonaparte, was rising to power. The need for the Daughters of Charity to return to works upon which much of French society had become dependent became increasingly apparent to his newly formed government. The hospitals in particular, and later the wounded of Napoléon’s Grand Army, called out for nurses. So it was that Sister Thérèse Deschaux, superior of the Hospital of Auch, approached the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Antoine Chaptal, for authorization to accept candidates who would be formed for the service of the sick. The interests of those who were poor, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and the French government coincided. The Minister asked Sister Deschaux to have Sister Antoinette Deleau, Superioress General at the time (1790-1804), send him a formal request. She did so, probably in late November or early December 1800, since the response from the Minister of the Interior is dated “1 Nivose, Year 9” (22 December 1800).
In her request, Sister Deleau makes several points. First she reminds the Minister that it is the government that “wants [them] to take up the service of suffering humanity once again.” She goes on to “assure him of [their] zeal to do so,” but she points out that this is impossible because of the lack of sisters caused by the suppression of the Company during the Reign of Terror. She even warns him that the sisters may have to withdraw from some of the places where they were allowed to continue their work during the Revolution because, “having lost a large number of sisters over a period of several years, [they] were not allowed to train pupils to replace them.”

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

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

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

Superioress General - 1790-1804.
Archives, Daughters of Charity, Paris
At the end, she once again spells out the request, "Therefore, Citizen Minister, we are soliciting from you authorization for a house of formation in which to train pupils for the service of the poor in different civil hospitals and governmental works of charity as well as the freedom for the Sister Directress to place and to transfer the sisters according to the needs."67

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Signed: CHAPTAL

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

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

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

69 Sister Antoinette Deleau, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1802, AFCP.
70 Sister Catherine Amblard, *Circulaire*, 1 January 1822, AFCP.
As with so much else concerning Sister Rosalie's early years, there is little documentation of this critical period in her life. There is nothing in the oral or written testimony for her cause to enlighten us. What we do know comes from general sources and from Sister Rosalie herself in her written testimony to Étienne-Michel Faillon, S.S., for a biography of Father Emery.\(^7\)

The formation that the founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, desired for their Daughters was one that sought to balance contemplation and the service of those in need, that is prayer and action. Their beginnings had marked a turning point in religious life for women by giving form to the concept of a consecrated life outside the walls of the cloister, where women came together in community to give themselves to God for the service of those who were poor. By 1802, the idea had become deeply rooted and imitated. Thus, formation stressed the primacy of a mission of service, but in a Vincentian spirit which required deep spiritual rootedness of the community as a whole and of each individual sister. The sisters were called upon to practice humility, simplicity, and charity among themselves, with those with whom they collaborated in their work, and especially with those whom they served. They were to be totally “given to God for the service of persons who are poor”\(^7\) whom they were “to serve with compassion, mildness, cordiality, respect, and devotion.”\(^7\)

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

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

\(^7\) Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 80-84.
\(^7\) CED, 9:534.
\(^7\) Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor (Emmitsburg, 1976), Chapter VII, Article 1.
From the earliest days in the history of the community, Louise de Marillac had insisted on the necessity of preserving this linkage with the congregation founded by Vincent de Paul. Saint Louise went on the offensive when, in 1646, Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, approved the Company of the Daughters of Charity with the following stipulation:

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

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

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

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

\[^{74}\text{CED, 13:558.}\]
\[^{75}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{76}\text{Louise Sullivan, D.C., ed., trans., \textit{Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts} (Brooklyn, 1991): 234; see also 364.}\]
...it pleased us to approve once again the said new confraternity and its statutes and regulations contained herein [which differ from those of 1646 only on minor points77] and to grant to the said supplicant [Vincent de Paul] and to his successors as superiors general of the said Congregation of the Mission the power to direct the said confraternity under our authority and jurisdiction.78

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

77 CED, 13:571, note 1.
Sister Rosalie herself, in her testimony concerning this man to whom she says she "owes [her] holy vocation," speaks of his place in her life and in the life of the Company at this still troubled epoch. She points out that he was an advisor to Sister Deleau, and would continue in this role with Sister Deschaux when she replaced Sister Deleau as Superioress General. She recalls that, during her seminary, Father Emery "had a very close relationship" with the newly re-established Community, giving instructions and advice, rooted in his own devotion to Saint Vincent, and hearing confessions.

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80 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio: Sommaire, 82.
81 Ibid., 81.
82 Ibid., 81-82.
On a personal level, Sister Rosalie describes him as a spiritual advisor and confidant who visited her every day, something that he could do without too much difficulty, since the two houses were separated by only a five-minute walk. She gratefully recognizes Father Emery's exceptional kindness to her and the advice that he gave her, advice that made "a great impression" on her and which was always "clear and brief" and, even when it entailed a correction, was always marked by "charity and a spirit of faith." According to his godchild, in all his dealings with her and with the community he was "a true priest."83

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

83 Ibid., 82.
84 Ibid.
Another adage that Father Emery surely learned at the school of Saint Vincent de Paul, and which in his “great wisdom” he passed on to his young charge, was not to run ahead of Divine Providence but “to take one day at a time.” This would prove invaluable to the young sister who seems to have had a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to her new life. She certainly believed that she had been called to it by God so, with her characteristic stubbornness, she would be determined to stay and become a Daughter of Charity. This intensity, coupled with the separation from her family and the Jura, however, appears to have taken a toll on her health.

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

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85 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 27.
Did he learn of that from his friend Sister Rosalie herself? Most likely, since he enters into considerable detail and, while no one confirms his remarks, neither does anyone contradict them. He tells us that, at this time, his friend was:

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

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

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

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

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 27-28.
90 Ibid., 28.
91 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 82-83.
92 Desmet, Sœur Rosalie, 78.
after her. This probably explains his daily visits to his godchild and his concern for her well-being. He knew her and her origins well, so he realized that what she needed was not the air of the Jura but the vast activity that she had there. He had discovered through his close contact with her that she was “too exclusively absorbed in striving for her personal perfection” and needed something to release the tension and “to free her generosity.” In short she needed to become part of “a great endeavor.”

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

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

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

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95 Ibid.
96 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 29.
97 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendi, Positio; Sommaire*, 62.
98 Ibid.
Thus, it was in an environment of total dedication to the service of those who were poor and with quiet courage that the young Sister Rendu completed her novitiate. She taught catechism to little girls whose religious formation had all but disappeared during the Revolution. Father Desmet tells us that, when school was not in session, she also visited the homes of those living in poverty. He does not give his source, but it is in all likelihood an accurate statement since this had been a work dear to the Daughters of Charity since their origins.

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

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

Habit taking...

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

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

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65 Desmet, Sœur Rosalie, 87.
66 Melun, Vie de la sœur Rosalie, 29.
67 Ibid.
68 Registre des Entrées au Séminaire (1801-1808), AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - Doc. 1.
which was to be placed in the town hall, “It was on 10 May 1803, in the parish of Saint-Médard, within the Saint-Marcel district, that the little known house on rue de l’Épée-de-Bois [which was probably at the time an annex of the Maison Saint-Martin] opened its doors to receive the young Sister Rosalie, who was then barely seventeen years old.”

The exact date is perhaps unimportant. What is significant is that the young girl, now called Sister Rosalie, returned to the area of Paris where she would spend the remainder of her life and where she would become a motor for social change. Because of her influence, the “little known house” would become a focal point for a broad spectrum of charitable activities that would reach from the most humble and abandoned hovels to the highest levels of power. The “Apostle of the Mouffetard district” was embarking on her life’s work.

Map of the XII$^{b}$ arrondissement during the time of Sister Rosalie.
Rue Mouffetard runs from top to bottom with rue de l’Épée-de-Bois in the upper center.

Archives, Congregation of the Mission, Paris

107 Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, Inauguration, 24.
Before leaving this period in Sister Rosalie's life, some consideration needs to be given to two other factors, namely the "supernatural test" and the Vincentian balance of contemplation and action.

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

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

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

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

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103 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, Rendu, Positio; Sommaire, 44-45.
Whatever the details of this event, while one cannot fault Sister Tardy’s motivation, one has every right to seriously challenge her judgment. She, if anyone, was aware of the eighteen-year-old’s “extreme sensitivity.” After all, Sister Rosalie had been removed from the Motherhouse and placed with her precisely because of it. The results of her little experiment could have proven disastrous, but fortunately they did not. Sister Rosalie appears only to have continued to grow and thrive in the environment of the Mouffetard district. As for Sister Tardy, years later when speaking to two of her companions about Sister Rosalie, who had replaced her as the local superior at the age of twenty-nine, she said, “You have certainly gained from this change. Sister Rosalie is a saint.”

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

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

104 Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie*, 27.
105 Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis, *Rendu, Positio; Sommaire*, 45.
Be humble, gentle, obedient of heart, and simple as a dove... Goodbye, my dear little friend. Be assured of my sincere and affectionate devotion in the love of Our Lord.106

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

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

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

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

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

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106 Letter of Sister Rosalie to Sister Françoise Cowan, 26 March [1838], AFCP, 8J2 - Ro - La 6.
worship was outlawed, instruction neglected, one cannot easily find a child who knows how to read or a woman who remembers her prayers. Souls severed from truth have become as poor as the bodies. The way needs to be reopened to the Church, the school, and the workshop. Everything needs to be rebuilt or repaired.\textsuperscript{107}

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{107} Melun, \textit{Vie de la sœur Rosalie}, 30-31.
my dear Aunt, pray to Our Lord for me so that He will grant me the grace to accomplish His will as I should.\textsuperscript{108}

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

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

\textsuperscript{109} CED, 9:533-534.