

## CHARITABLE LADIES: GENDER, CLASS AND RELIGION IN MID NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARIS\*

Since the publication of Bonnie Smith's *Ladies of the Leisure Class* in 1981, the well-to-do society lady of nineteenth-century France, dispensing charity and good works, usually under the auspices of the Catholic church, has become a stock figure to historians — bustling about the periphery of studies on women, religion and society. Perpetually just off-stage, everyone acknowledges her existence but few since Smith have subjected her to much in-depth research or analysis.<sup>1</sup> Smith's path-breaking work showed how involvement in charity, especially religious charity, allowed elite women to reproduce domesticity in the public sphere. Yet this model, which vividly contrasts the domestic vision developed by bourgeois women with the liberal ethos of their husbands, fathers and brothers, does not attempt to measure the role that charitable women played in the overall picture of poor relief in the nineteenth-century city nor to evaluate what such charity meant to the Catholic church; it focuses instead on the symbolic meanings of female *caritas*.<sup>2</sup> While historians of France since Smith have become increasingly interested in the origins of poor relief and the welfare state, both women's charity and Catholic charity have nevertheless remained at the margins of their research.<sup>3</sup> There are some practical reasons for this

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1981). One noteworthy exception, however, is Ruth Harris's brilliant examination of the upper-class women who organized pilgrimages to Lourdes in her *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London, 1999). The relative neglect of charitable women appears to be largely a phenomenon of French history; for other countries, especially Britain, a more fully developed historiography exists.

<sup>2</sup> See Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, ch. 6.

<sup>3</sup> The great exception here is the work of Rachel G. Fuchs, especially her *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, 1992). But Fuchs focuses on the recipients rather than the practitioners of charity,

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neglect. The locus of much of this charity was the parish church, whose records are scattered and incomplete; its practitioners were lay and religious women who were explicitly schooled in the virtues of humility and self-abnegation; and its clients were the silent and illiterate poor. Yet during much of the nineteenth century, in fact, the philanthropic activities of women became as central to the structure of welfare provision in France as they were to the restoration of a Catholic social order.

As the numbers of the indigent vastly outpaced state welfare capacities in the industrial age, French public assistance efforts relied heavily on private, especially Catholic, participation. For the Catholic church, charity involvement became an important tool in the re-Christianization of France after the Revolution, ensuring the rebuilding of parish structures and — it hoped — the gratitude and loyalty of the poor through attention to material needs and spiritual consolation. Catholic women's lay associations, in partnership with female religious orders, were the primary actors in this effort. Yet historians of the Catholic church still lionize the role of men's charity associations, which left better records and engaged more overtly in politics.<sup>4</sup> Although the 'feminization' of Catholicism has become an accepted concept in the history of the nineteenth-century French church, it is applied much more readily to the explosion of female religious orders and to the gender divide in religious practice than to the proliferation of Catholic women's lay associations, whose history remains incomplete. And French urban historians, especially those of Paris — a recent growth industry — neglect religious infrastructure, people as well as administration and buildings, in what at least appears to have been the great secularizing age of the

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and does not specifically investigate catholic charities nor use church archives. Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, *Associations féminines et catholicisme, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1990), mainly covers charitable groups after 1880. Catherine Duprat's monumental work, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie: pauvreté, action sociale et lien social, à Paris, au cours du premier XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1996-7), gives attention to Catholic charity, but mentions women's associations only in passing, a 'silence' she confronts in her 'Le Silence des femmes: associations féminines du premier XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', in Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Lalouette and Michèle Riot-Sarcey (eds.), *Femmes dans la Cité, 1815-1871* (Grâne, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)* (Paris, 1951); Pierre Pierrard, *L'Église et les ouvriers en France (1840-1940)* (Paris, 1984); Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse sous le second empire* (Paris, 2001).

nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Falling between the cracks of historical scholarship, the lady of charity nevertheless walked purposively through the public spaces of modern Paris, dispensing material aid and spiritual sustenance to the ever-growing poor, as familiar a figure to contemporaries as the *flâneuse*, or the shopper, or even the streetwalker — all female emblems of urban modernity.

That modernity, however, was achieved paradoxically by a reinvention of religious models first developed during the Catholic Reformation. Although historians have generally isolated developments in poor relief on either side of the great divide of the French Revolution,<sup>6</sup> the study of nineteenth-century women's charity benefits from an understanding of its seventeenth-century roots. After the twin shocks of disestablishment and de-Christianization during the Revolution, the French Catholic church returned self-consciously to Reformation models in evangelization, education, medical care and welfare in order to re-establish their utility in French life. The lay confraternity, as well as the active religious order, re-emerged as important agents of both evangelization and welfare distribution, and both became important vehicles for female activity.<sup>7</sup> Although early modern historians have typically traced an evolution of attitudes from 'traditional Christian charity' to the bureaucratic, state-sponsored model of the Revolution — from 'charity to *bienfaisance*'<sup>8</sup> — that paradigm was replaced in the post-Revolutionary period by a model of personalized contact and spiritual moralization that depended heavily on institutions and models first developed during the seventeenth century.

<sup>5</sup> This point is made forcefully in the introduction to the recently published, and much needed, religious history of Paris by Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse*. Yet even Boudon barely mentions women's charitable associations, while devoting an entire chapter to the 'social Catholicism' of men's groups.

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850* (London, 1998). This recent collection of essays attempts to overcome the divide; it also explores national differences in charity and the relationship between private and state-sponsored efforts.

<sup>7</sup> On the phenomenal expansion of female religious orders in nineteenth-century France, see Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Cissie Fairchild, *Poverty and Charity in Aix-en-Provence, 1640–1789* (Baltimore, 1976), 37, 147. See also Kathryn Norberg, *Rich and Poor in Grenoble, 1600–1814* (Berkeley, 1985), 298–304. Thomas Adams, *Bureaucrats and Beggars: French Social Policy in the Age of the Enlightenment* (New York, 1990), 256, argues that the eighteenth-century consensus regarding the role of public authority in reducing poverty did not survive the Terror.

This article seeks to locate and analyse the charitable woman in mid nineteenth-century Paris through the examination of one particular nexus of Catholic poor relief, the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* — originally founded by Vincent de Paul in the seventeenth century and re-established in 1840 — whose members were more commonly known as the *Dames de la Charité*. Nowhere was charity and the state of the poor a more pressing issue than in the always impoverished and often revolutionary conditions of France's capital. Here elite women took the initiative in creating the private welfare associations that served increasing numbers of impoverished residents who overwhelmed the existing framework of state-sponsored charity. As the largest and most successful of these organizations, the *Dames de la Charité* sought to provide generalized material and spiritual aid for the poor in the rapidly changing urban environment of 'godless' Paris, in conjunction with their sister organization, the *Filles de la Charité*, through home visits organized on a parish basis. For the women who practised such charity, philanthropic associations provided them with opportunities to meet and collaborate with like-minded women, to reinforce their own faith and values, to manage money and learn administrative skills, to venture into the neighbourhoods and the homes of the poor and to create relationships across class lines. But transforming the personal and the domestic into a public role for women was not the only, nor even the most important, role of feminine charity in this time and place. Until the laicizing reforms of the Third Republic in the 1880s, women's unpaid labour remained an important component of an overall urban welfare policy in which church and government agents worked more often in collaboration than in opposition, and in which the lines of public and private effectively blurred. As Paris transformed its physical structures and geographical limits during the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, women's associations were on the front lines of the war against poverty and social revolution. Invested with less overt political baggage than other Catholic personnel, these women also extended the reach and bolstered the reputation of the church as it struggled to adapt to the rapid pace of urbanization in the diocese of Paris. Through the ministry of charitable ladies, Catholics hoped not only to assuage the hardships of the urban poor but also to regain their allegiance to the church. Women's charity work in general, and the *Dames de la Charité* in particular,

whether viewed from the perspective of church or state, lay not on the margins of the poor relief mission in nineteenth-century Paris but at its very heart.

## I

### PARIS IN THE AGE OF CHOLERA

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the city of Paris appeared to almost all observers to be an increasingly dangerous and impoverished place. Established since 1789 as the city of revolution par excellence, barricades had gone up during the Revolution of 1830 and again in 1832 and 1834. The violence was fuelled in part by increasing poverty in a city that had become desperately overcrowded. Due largely to immigration, the population of Paris doubled between 1801 and 1851, reaching over a million inhabitants by 1846. Yet by and large housing availability remained the same, resulting in severe overcrowding, especially in working-class districts and those populated by newcomers. The poor crowded into alleys and tenements and overflowed into the streets. The increase in population put the city's infrastructure — streets, sewers, water supply — under serious strain. Far from being the 'city of light', Paris in the early nineteenth century was damp, dark and dirty. Smallpox epidemics broke out in Paris three times in the 1820s, and the disease remained virulent throughout the first half of the century. Economic depression caused the price of bread to rise for six consecutive years between 1826 and 1832, when the municipal government finally fixed its price. Over a third of working-class births were illegitimate; suicides increased; prostitution, infanticide and child abandonment were rife in poor neighbourhoods; and beggars and vagabonds wandered the streets. Louis Chevalier has estimated that in normal times a quarter of the Paris population suffered 'a monstrous and permanent poverty', which increased to half of the population in times of crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps no event cemented the perception of Paris as a diseased and pathological city as much as the devastating cholera epidemic of 1832 that killed eighteen thousand inhabitants. During the

<sup>9</sup> Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1973), 183, 199, 262, 268, 276–7, 290–1, 311, 332, 353.

epidemic, the literal disease of the city appeared to mirror the metaphorical disease described by social reformers and evoked by such writers as Balzac and Hugo. Largely a malady emanating from the most impoverished quarters of the city, cholera threatened to overwhelm the whole of Paris. Poverty and the social disorder that went with it had become contagious. Catherine J. Kudlick has convincingly argued that the 'vivid reactions' to cholera in 1832, in contrast to relative bourgeois 'silence' at the time of a second epidemic in 1849, resulted from insecurity among the elite classes regarding their place in the changing Paris environment and newly formed July Monarchy.<sup>10</sup> More than any other single factor, cholera in 1832 forced nineteenth-century elites to consider the problem of the poor seriously, and helped shape attitudes towards social class and poor relief.

Nowhere was this more true than among Catholics, who had additional reasons to fear developments in the new Paris. Paris since the Revolution had become a notoriously irreligious place. Church attendance did not keep up with population growth, a problem aggravated by the lack of new parishes and adequate clergy. In 1856 Paris had only seven more parishes — making a total of forty-six — than it had had in 1801, despite a doubling of the population. In the suburbs, where the population increased sixfold, only a single new parish was created.<sup>11</sup> The poorest neighbourhoods had the most overcrowded parishes. In the wealthy neighbourhoods around the Invalides, for example, the parishes of L'Abbaye-aux-Bois and Ste-Valère served only six thousand inhabitants each, whereas the parish of St-Laurent, in the north-eastern working-class sector of the city, contained 64,500 inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Immigrants to Paris came disproportionately from the Paris basin and parts of south-eastern France where religious indifference was highest, and levels of Easter communion in the city were among the lowest in France. The process of migration itself, especially from countryside to city, often weakened religious habits.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Catherine J. Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1996), 213–14.

<sup>11</sup> Yvan Daniel, *L'Équipement paroissial d'un diocèse urbain: Paris (1802–1956)* (Paris, 1956), 174–5.

<sup>12</sup> Philippe Vigier, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris: Paris pendant la Monarchie de Juillet (1830–1848)* (Paris, 1991), 463.

<sup>13</sup> Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse*, 203–9; Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789–1914* (London, 1989), 174–9, 225.

Given the shock of cholera, the shortage of parish priests, the increasing poverty of the city, the inadequacy of existing poor relief and the need — from the Catholic point of view — to shore up religious practice and belief, many lay Catholics turned towards philanthropy in the 1830s and 1840s as a means to alleviate what Abbé Lecreulle of the parish of St-Roch called ‘the gulf of hatred between rich and poor’.<sup>14</sup> In 1833, Frédéric Ozanam founded the Société de St-Vincent de Paul which encouraged Christian men to proselytize among the poor while providing material aid. In 1846, the Vicomte Armand de Melun created Catholic associations for elite men to promote a ‘charitable’ rather than a ‘social’ economy.<sup>15</sup> As substitutes and auxiliaries for clergy and the inventors of social Catholicism, these men saw their mission as easing the misery of the poor, improving class relations and increasing religious faith.<sup>16</sup>

They were outnumbered, however, by Catholic women’s associations, which proliferated during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some had their roots in Old Regime groups that re-established themselves after the Revolution, while others were new foundations that responded to increasing poverty and decreasing faith. Most worked in conjunction with one of the rapidly expanding female active religious orders and appear in church records under a dizzying array of names. In its simplest form, a group of women met under the leadership of the local parish priest and visited the poor to provide spiritual comfort and distribute alms donated to the church.<sup>17</sup> One such general association often spun off others that specialized in particular works of charity: providing clothing for first communions, or sewing classes for girls, or vigils at the bedside of dying patients. The Vestiaire de St-Sulpice, located in one of Paris’s most active

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in H. A. C. Collingham, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France, 1830–1848* (London, 1988), 308.

<sup>15</sup> Pierrard, *L’Église et les ouvriers en France*, 188.

<sup>16</sup> On social Catholicism, see Duroselle, *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France*; Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse*.

<sup>17</sup> Few records exist for these associations, except for the occasional book of minutes saved in parish or diocesan archives. By the 1850s and 1860s, charity manuals described them as ubiquitous in Paris parishes. For information on the ‘renaissance’ of such associations in the provinces, see Hazel Mills, ‘Negotiating the Divide: Women, Philanthropy and the “Public Sphere” in Nineteenth-Century France’, in Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (eds.), *Religion, Society, and Politics in France since 1789* (London, 1991); Hazel Mills, ‘“La Charité est une Mère”: Catholic Women and Poor Relief in France, 1690–1850’, in Cunningham and Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform*.

parishes, for example, brought women together in three-hour sessions to make clothing for the poor.<sup>18</sup> Hard times generated various initiatives, such as the Marmite St-Georges in the neighbourhood of the same name, where local parish women distributed three hundred portions of soup per day during the winter of 1848–9, and then established the Œuvre des secours à domicile to aid the needy on a more permanent basis.<sup>19</sup>

Among the more formal groups, besides the Œuvre des pauvres malades, the best-known women's charities specialized in helping women and children, especially pregnant women and new mothers. These associations had in common a desire to 'rehabilitate' poor women through a combination of material aid and Catholic morality. The Société de Charité Maternelle, originally founded in 1788, provided layettes, medical care and material aid for needy pregnant women of good character in Paris and several provincial cities.<sup>20</sup> In 1836, the Association des Mères de Famille was founded to provide similar services to women who did not qualify for aid from the Société de Charité Maternelle, and also provided a linen-lending service and children's beds. The Société Charitable de St-François-Régis de Paris (founded in 1826) helped arrange the Catholic weddings that were usually required for mothers to benefit from these charities.<sup>21</sup> The Œuvre du Bon Pasteur (founded in 1819) specialized in rehabilitating prostitutes and the Société de patronage des jeunes filles détenues et libérées (founded in 1838) did the same for women prisoners. The Jeunes Économies (founded in 1823) encouraged wealthy young women to provide material aid to 'adoptive' working-class girls, who

<sup>18</sup> Rosalie Dubois, *Paris catholique au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: tableau des progrès merveilleux de la charité contemporaine en France: suivi de 'La Vie de la Sœur Rosalie fille de S.-Vincent-de-Paul'* (Paris, 1857), 92–3.

<sup>19</sup> *Mémoire du préfet de la Seine à la Commission municipale sur la répartition du fonds de secours entre divers établissements de bienfaisance en 1850* (Paris, 1850), 25–6.

<sup>20</sup> Among nineteenth-century women's charitable associations, this society has been given the most historical attention: see Stuart Woolf, 'The Société de Charité Maternelle, 1788–1815', in Jonathan Barry and Colin Jones (eds.), *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* (London, 1991); Jean-Pierre Chaline, 'Sociabilité féminine et "maternalisme": les sociétés de Charité Maternelle au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', in Corbin, Lalouette and Riot-Sarcey (eds.), *Femmes dans la Cité*; Christine Adams, 'Constructing Mothers and Families: The Society for Maternal Charity of Bordeaux, 1805–1860', *French Hist. Studies*, xxii (1999).

<sup>21</sup> The work of charities like this one focusing on marriage and childbirth is considered in Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, and Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii.



were given an education and employable skills under religious auspices.<sup>22</sup>

All these myriad groups contributed to increased sociability among elite Parisian women. By mid century, wealthy and leisured Parisian Catholic women had no shortage of outlets for their philanthropic energies, estimated by one historian as consisting of thirty-nine charitable associations, seventeen of which were entirely run by women, plus innumerable parish associations, that supported single mothers, primary and nursery schools, the sick, the aged, the infirm, home care, apprentices, prostitutes, convicts and the unemployed. Long-lasting and stable, they administered budgets as large as those of their masculine counterparts, without a single bankruptcy in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In Paris, many of these groups overlapped, often soliciting funds from the same donors and patrons, using similar structures and methods, collaborating with the same religious orders, and even working together in particular neighbourhoods or parishes. The *Œuvre des pauvres malades*, however, was the least specialized of these associations, dedicated to helping the poor and the sick of both sexes and all ages. It was also the most successful. Catherine Duprat points out that in 1843 — whereas the *Association des Mères de Famille* supported 714 mothers, the *Société de Charité Maternelle* 900 mothers, and the *Société Charitable de St-François-Régis de Paris* 1,360 couples — the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* visited over ten thousand families, three times as many as its male analogue, the *Société de St-Vincent de Paul*. She attributes this success primarily to its link with the *Filles de la Charité*, its sister association, whose members acted as public welfare agents. A poor family who received assistance from the local *Fille de la Charité* was not likely to shut the door on her lay associate.<sup>24</sup> But the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* also attracted the largest number of members, growing from the original twenty founders in 1840 to three hundred members five years later, and 490 in 1850. By 1853, the *dames* counted 630

<sup>22</sup> For useful surveys of the vast array of nineteenth-century charitable associations, see *Manuel des œuvres et institutions religieuses et charitables de Paris* (Paris, 1867); Dubois, *Paris catholique au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

<sup>23</sup> Duprat, 'Le Silence des femmes', 83, 89. Duprat's notes in this article include a list; some of the larger and more formal associations, male and female, are profiled in both volumes of her *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*.

<sup>24</sup> Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 1237–8.

members in twenty-nine Paris parishes.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the Société de Charité Maternelle, although extremely prestigious, never had enough voluntary personnel to serve all needy Paris neighbourhoods in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

Those needs were great. Before 1880, governmental poor relief in France was a local affair administered by both lay and church officials. In Paris, each of the city's twelve arrondissements had a public welfare office (*bureau de bienfaisance*) that kept records of the poor, determined who received both temporary and fixed aid, and distributed material and medical assistance to those enrolled on their lists. The welfare council included the mayor of the arrondissement, local notables, a salaried accountant, the doctors and midwife who treated the poor, and, until 1830, the parish priest.<sup>27</sup> The day-to-day delivery of poor relief was provided by the Filles de la Charité in 'maisons de secours' that doubled as their lodgings. From this base of operations, they ran a soup kitchen, distributed clothing, provided pharmaceutical services, visited the poor and sick, and sometimes opened nursery and girls' schools. They were simultaneously nurses, pharmacists, social workers, teachers and ministers, distributing government aid to those poor on the official lists, and private aid to those who were not.<sup>28</sup> One author described the 'comings and goings' in their houses as 'incessant', since 'for the popular quarters, it was the known and respected location where everyone rushes as soon as an accident happens, a tragedy is discovered, a misfortune

<sup>25</sup> Archives des Pères Lazaristes, Paris (hereafter APL), 'Compte général rendu de l'œuvre des pauvres malades visités à domicile' (1851); 'Œuvre des pauvres malades', in *Annales de la Charité: revue mensuelle destinée à la discussion des questions et à l'examen des institutions qui intéressent les classes pauvres* (1854), 65–6. Branches were also established in a number of parishes in provincial cities (fifty by 1886), especially those, like Paris, experiencing the dislocations of urbanization and industrialization. The association also expanded abroad, but Paris remained the headquarters of the Œuvre des pauvres malades, and its most important arena for action.

<sup>26</sup> Other women's charities in the same period had between ten and fifty active visiting members: Duprat, 'Le Silence des femmes', 85.

<sup>27</sup> The evolution of this system during the first half of the nineteenth century is fully detailed in Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, i.

<sup>28</sup> The history of the Filles de la Charité in the nineteenth century has yet to be written. For general information on their activity in this period, see Pierre Coste et al., *Les Filles de la Charité: trois siècles d'histoire religieuse* (Paris, 1933); *Les Filles de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1923); R. Laurentin, *Vie de Catherine Labouré: voyante de la rue du Bac et servante des pauvres, 1806–1876*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1980); Paul Renaudin, *Les Filles de la Charité* (Paris, 1930); Léo Taxil and P. Marcel, *Les Sœurs de Charité: histoire populaire des sœurs de Saint-Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1889).

comes to light'.<sup>29</sup> Although parish priests were excluded from local welfare councils in 1830, no one ever seriously proposed replacing the Filles de la Charité, whose positive public image was built on their monopoly over popular charity as well as their hospital work.<sup>30</sup> Few agents, indeed, would have been as dedicated or as cheap. To the sisters, distribution of poor relief was a religious duty and mission that allowed them to evangelize among the poor and sanctify their own lives at the same time as they relieved physical suffering. Bound by vows of poverty, they worked for a minimal annual salary (around four hundred francs per nun), plus free lodgings and linen. Until the advent of the Third Republic in 1870, both church and state agreed that only nuns had the indispensable training, stamina and moral authority necessary to provide nursing care, to walk the streets with impunity and to enter the congested, diseased and dirty homes of the poor.

Just as the city's welfare offices relied on a private religious congregation to provide most of their day-to-day poor relief, they also relied on private charity for part of their financial resources. Faced with ever-increasing numbers of poor in the early nineteenth century, the public budget seldom provided enough money to pay for the medical and material assistance that the welfare offices required. As a result, they regularly resorted to private fund-raising.<sup>31</sup> Six times a year, they were allowed to mount a collection box during the main mass in the local parish church. Special sermons during Holy Week netted additional funds. Sometime in late autumn, as cold weather descended on Paris, many welfare councils posted notices and sent out fund-raising letters pleading for additional funds to support 'the elderly, chil-

<sup>29</sup> Maxime Du Camp, *Paris: ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1869–75), iv, 109.

<sup>30</sup> The city was free to contract with any religious congregation to provide welfare services, but in Paris, with few exceptions, officials preferred the Filles de la Charité, who ran many of the city's hospitals as well. In Paris alone, by mid century, the Filles de la Charité ran thirteen hospitals and hospices, and fifty-five welfare offices, staffed by almost six hundred nuns serving 150,000 adults and 20,000 children. On their own initiative, they also opened orphanages, workshops, schools and rest homes for the working classes. Sandra Horvath-Peterson, 'Abbé Georges Darboy's *Statistique religieuse du diocèse de Paris* (1856)', *Catholic Hist. Rev.*, lxxviii (1982), 410.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to public subsidies and the private donations discussed here, Parisian *assistance publique* also had property investments from which it derived income. See Paul Weindling, 'The Modernization of Charity in Nineteenth-Century France and Germany', in Barry and Jones (eds.), *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State*, 193.

dren, the infirm [who] lack bread, clothing and sleep on straw with neither sheets nor blankets'.<sup>32</sup> These letters were followed up with door-to-door collections. Although it appears that men were more likely to visit the homes of strangers, women in the wealthy parish of St-Roch, which had a long-established female charity association, shared in this duty.<sup>33</sup> More likely, however, women solicited funds in church or among friends and family. They also sponsored religious activities, such as sermons, or social ones, such as balls, which brought in additional money. In 1843, for example, charitable women in the first arrondissement collected 7,600 francs at a special sermon to which they invited wealthy acquaintances.<sup>34</sup> That these women were 'noble, young, and beautiful', in the words of one historian, was no coincidence; women not only sold tickets to social and religious events, but they also attracted attendees by their presence. After the royal lottery and public gaming were outlawed in 1836 and 1838, charity lotteries became another popular fund-raising tool.<sup>35</sup> As the bourgeoisie gained in importance in Parisian society, philanthropic methods such as these became a way to legitimize its rise by mimicking older aristocratic practices.<sup>36</sup> By the time of the July Monarchy, elite women who pestered their social networks for donations were enough of a social type to be satirized in an 1837 play entitled *Les Dames patronnesses*.<sup>37</sup>

The growth of private charities, most of them either affiliated with or inspired by the Catholic church, that worked independently or grafted themselves onto public welfare in the 1830s and 1840s resulted partly from the inability of the city welfare system to cope with the increasing numbers of poor that Paris attracted.

<sup>32</sup> Archives de Paris (hereafter AP), VD 6 115 (6): Bureau de Bienfaisance du Premier Arrondissement, form letter, 20 Nov. 1838.

<sup>33</sup> Lack of documents makes it difficult to judge how commonly women participated in door-to-door requests for donations on behalf of the poor. The records for charitable women in this parish, which only exist for the period from 1817 to 1831, include lists of streets and houses where pairs of women canvassed in any given year. Archives de l'Archevêché de Paris (hereafter AAP), 5 C, St-Roch, 'Registre des délibérations de l'association de charité de la paroisse de St-Roch de Paris, commencé le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 1817'.

<sup>34</sup> AP, VD 6 115 (6): Mairie du 1<sup>er</sup> arrondissement, 8 Mar. 1843.

<sup>35</sup> Duprat, 'Le Silence des femmes', 88–9.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Vie élégante ou la formation du Tout-Paris, 1815–1848* (Paris, 1990), 155.

<sup>37</sup> Adeline Daumard, *La Bourgeoisie parisienne de 1815 à 1848* (Paris, 1963), 224. For a comparative view of women as fund-raisers in the nineteenth century, see F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980).

Public poor relief helped only slightly more than half as many individuals under the July Monarchy as it had during the Napoleonic Empire, despite the skyrocketing population and worsening material conditions.<sup>38</sup> The number of households on the welfare rolls grew from 28,969 in 1835 to only 29,630 in 1856, peaking at 32,563 in the notoriously ‘hungry’ year of 1847.<sup>39</sup> In this context, private and religious groups like the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* were an important adjunct to official, government-sponsored charity, a fact the government acknowledged by providing subsidies to some of these groups.<sup>40</sup> Both the state and the poor came to rely heavily on their largesse during the July Monarchy and the Second Empire.

## II

### THE ŒUVRE DES PAUVRES MALADES

The main purpose of the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* was to provide relief to the poor and the sick, which required both the direct distribution of material aid and the fund-raising that made it possible. Individual women who joined their parish association were required either to visit the poor and sick or to donate fifty francs per year; in fact most members did both.<sup>41</sup> Because joining such an organization required an investment of either money or time or both, it was by necessity limited to ‘personnes du monde’, as the rules put it. The foundress, Vicountess Le Vavasour, began by recruiting members in the wealthy Parisian parishes of St-Thomas d’Aquin, St-Roch, and L’Abbaye-aux-Bois. Membership lists included more than a smattering of noble titles, and current members recruited new members, which assured that they would remain in the same social circle.<sup>42</sup> Members were also responsible for soliciting donations among their acquaintances,

<sup>38</sup> Bernard Marchand, *Paris: histoire d’une ville, XIX<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1993), 33.

<sup>39</sup> AP, VD 4/19 (4803): ‘État numérique de la population indigente de Paris, et renseignements statistiques sur cette population’.

<sup>40</sup> The *Œuvre des pauvres malades* received very little government aid, but other private charities were largely subsidized with public funds. Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 696, shows that the women’s groups, perceived as apolitical, usually kept their subsidies, even after changes in regime. For a discussion of public control of private charity, see Adams, ‘Constructing Mothers and Families’.

<sup>41</sup> APL, ‘Association des Dames de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul pour la visite des pauvres malades’ (1844).

<sup>42</sup> *Manuel des Dames de la Charité par un prêtre de la congrégation de la Mission* (Paris, 1886), p. ix. Unfortunately, the existing membership lists are not complete

(cont. on p. 134)

which, along with their own subscriptions and parish collections, made up the majority of the association's resources. Membership also included 'honorary' categories for women who wished to donate but not participate actively; this was primarily a means for fund-raising among the very rich, who might wish to lend their name and money to the cause without attending meetings or visiting the poor themselves. It was not uncommon for an association based in a wealthy parish to raise and distribute between five and fifteen thousand francs a year; by 1862, the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* had handled over one million francs since their refoundation twenty-two years earlier.<sup>43</sup> Parish associations like the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* solved an important philanthropic difficulty of the nineteenth-century church. Although forbidden by law to raise money directly for the poor through its parish councils (*fabriques*), for fear of competing with the public welfare offices (*bureaux de bienfaisance*), there was no such legal prohibition on the donation of funds to women's lay groups.<sup>44</sup> The evidence suggests that the church took full advantage of this loophole to leverage the wealth of the faithful on behalf of the poor.

As the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* grew, the association also developed an administrative structure that allowed it to co-ordinate its fund-raising and membership process as well as to expand into new parishes. Meeting monthly, a council made up of the president, vice presidents, secretary, and treasurer of the association voted on the adoption of new parishes, new members, and the exclusion of members, and also kept statistics and records. In addition to the council meetings and monthly meetings of all members in each parish, general assemblies were held four times a year. New parishes wishing to join the general association requested admission through their parish priest, with the council making the final decision on which parishes to adopt.<sup>45</sup> Parishes with informal women's associations that predated the refoundation of the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* (including a few that had

(n. 42 cont.)

enough to allow for a more nuanced analysis of social origins than given here; in particular, the respective proportions of noble and bourgeois women remain unknown.

<sup>43</sup> APL, '13<sup>e</sup> Compte-Général rendu de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 1840 au 31 Décembre 1861'.

<sup>44</sup> Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 1238.

<sup>45</sup> APL, 'Compte général rendu de l'œuvre des pauvres malades visités à domicile' (1851).

survived the Revolution) could in this way become affiliated with a larger, more powerful society without compromising their local character. At the same time, the existence of the centralized association was a stimulus to new foundations. Within each parish, the work of the Dames de la Charité was undertaken in collaboration with the *curé*, who served as spiritual director. The overall direction of the Œuvre des pauvres malades was placed under its superior general, Jean-Baptiste Étienne, who served simultaneously as the head of the Pères Lazaristes and the Filles de la Charité, both Paris-based religious congregations originally founded by Vincent de Paul.<sup>46</sup> Despite the spiritual supervision of priests, however, the everyday work of administration, fund-raising, visiting, nursing and consoling remained firmly in the hands of the association members.<sup>47</sup>

Nineteenth-century commentators agreed that by virtue of their sex, women had a special charitable mission. ‘Charity, dear Louise’, wrote an ‘older woman’ to a ‘young lady’, in an article in the review *Annales de la Charité*, ‘is in the heart of woman: God placed it there to help her endure the pains of her condition; like a light to guide her in the mission that she must accomplish every day of her life; like a support to preserve her from all falls’.<sup>48</sup> Women’s perceived qualities of compassion, maternal love and self-sacrifice were considered eminently suitable for the practice of charity, particularly when informed by Christian belief. Church teachings and literature, bolstered by the Marian revival of the nineteenth century, increasingly emphasized women’s ‘natural’ piety and virtue as well as their ability to transmit those qualities to others. Through Christian charity, according to one

<sup>46</sup> Étienne was an active and engaged superior general, under whose leadership the Pères Lazaristes (officially known as the Congrégation de la Mission) added fourteen new provinces and 120 new houses, and the Filles de la Charité grew from five thousand to twenty thousand members: *Vie de M. Étienne, XIV<sup>e</sup> supérieur général de la Congrégation de la Mission et de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité par un prêtre de la Mission* (Paris, 1881), 448–9.

<sup>47</sup> Women’s collaboration with priests in these kinds of associations led to the charge that they were mere pawns in the hands of a manipulative clergy. The evidence available for the Œuvre des pauvres malades does not support this view. Some parish priests were more active directors than others, but in all parishes women initiated projects and directed the everyday distribution of charity as well as the necessary fund-raising. The women who collaborated with Étienne appear to have worked as active partners, not subordinates. For an interesting discussion of this issue, see Harris, *Lourdes*, 226–36.

<sup>48</sup> Mme De Godefroy née de Ménilglaise, ‘La Charité faite par la femme: conseils d’une femme âgée à une jeune femme’, *Annales de la Charité* (1846), 174.

preacher, women's apparent 'weakness' could be transformed into 'strength': thus, 'when united to God, you seek to correspond to his designs for you, in accomplishing the works that he deigns to give to you'.<sup>49</sup> Charity, if practised correctly, also provided wealthy women with an opportunity to escape from frivolity and vanity. Margaret Darrow has argued that noblewomen returning to prominence in Restoration France consciously adopted domesticity in order to counter their Old Regime and Revolutionary image as overly worldly and decadent; charity work on behalf of the poor was part of this new image.<sup>50</sup> Catholic writers lauded the charitable woman over the 'femme mondaine' who only thought of herself, and therefore lost the esteem of others. Indeed practising charity became part of the definition of the Christian woman, for whom 'it is not enough to pray, to take communion, to avoid evil . . . She must love the poor, work for the poor, visit, and if need be care for and heal the poor'.<sup>51</sup> By turning their attention to the less fortunate, conventional wisdom decreed, society women grew morally and spiritually. Bourgeois women themselves, as Bonnie Smith has shown, internalized and appropriated these values, investing their charity work with moral and spiritual symbolism.<sup>52</sup>

Nineteenth-century Catholic lay associations for women also provided direct religious benefits to those women who participated. In addition to their sacrifices on behalf of the poor, women who joined the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* were expected to work 'with ardour' for their own sanctification, to recite prayers in honour of St-Vincent de Paul on a daily basis, to take communion on days special to the association and to attend memorial masses and rosaries for deceased members.<sup>53</sup> Fulfilling these religious duties, along with their charitable ones, gained members special indulgences granted by Rome, which in turn attracted members. Business meetings always included a spiritual component in the form of prayers, readings and a sermon. Priests urged members to precede their visits to the poor with a visit to the

<sup>49</sup> Archives de l'Archevêché de Lyon, I.584: 'Œuvre des Pauvres Incurables, Assemblées Générales', 18 Mar. 1845.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Darrow, 'French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750–1850', *Feminist Studies*, v (1979), 43.

<sup>51</sup> Félix Dupanloup, *La Charité chrétienne et ses œuvres* (Paris, 1864), 168.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, 136–7.

<sup>53</sup> APL, 'Association des Dames de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul pour la visite des pauvres malades' (1840).



holy sacrament, or at the very least, with prayer, in order to transform their act of charity into an act of piety. This intense spiritual component both nurtured the faith of members and made it more likely that they would carry that faith into the homes of the poor.

### III

#### HOME VISITS

The centrepiece of the charity organized by the Dames de la Charité was the home visiting which the ladies themselves conducted. Each active member was expected to visit the families assigned to her at least once a month, and to make a report to the Filles de la Charité in that parish (who also visited the same families) as well as to the monthly meeting of the association, where particular situations could be talked over and women could act as advocates for 'their' families. This happened, for example, when 'the cause of the widow Leroy, rue Coquillière, 40, was pleaded energetically by Mme Saintyres, and the interest that she excited resulted in her being accorded the maximum of aid in clothing and bread and meat coupons'.<sup>54</sup> The distribution of aid was no longer left, as it had often been during the Old Regime, to servants or stewards.<sup>55</sup> Personal contact with the poor was now considered an essential component of Christian charity because it provided an opportunity to 'establish a new bond of fraternity between the rich and the poor'<sup>56</sup> that would embody the Christian family. In a document of 1844, the association described the benefits accruing to wealthy ladies who made these kinds of visits:

Without harming the social hierarchy, the Œuvre des pauvres malades brings the women who belong to it closer to the poor that they visit; it makes them understand privations and sufferings that they have never experienced, and of which they perhaps do not even suspect the existence . . . It is thus that the members of the association are naturally brought to compare their destiny with those of the poor, their brothers in Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> AAP, 5 C, St-Eustache: Assemblées des Dames de Bon Secours, Procès Verbaux, 12 Sept. 1873.

<sup>55</sup> Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 954.

<sup>56</sup> *Manuel des Dames de la Charité*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> APL, 'Association des Dames de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul pour la visite des pauvres malades' (1844).

Working among the poor was not always easy: it required ‘tact, delicacy of feelings, and experience’.<sup>58</sup> But ‘every time that you leave the bosom of your families, that you travel through the streets of this capital in all times and all seasons with charitable intentions’, Étienne, the association’s superior general, reminded the Dames de la Charité, ‘it is Jesus Christ himself that you have visited, consoled, aided, strengthened . . . your works are divine; the rewards that will crown them will also be divine’.<sup>59</sup> Loving and serving the poor was the equivalent of loving and serving God. Home visits emphasized the holiness of personal contact with the poor and the sick, and the importance of nursing and feeding them with the ladies’ own hands. In exchange, ladies of charity learned from the ‘simplicity’ of the poor facing adversity, illness and death.<sup>60</sup>

Even more important than the spiritual understanding that personal and direct charity would confer on its practitioners, however, home visits were considered the best way of reaching the poor. Although they had been used occasionally in earlier periods, they became a staple of nineteenth-century voluntary assistance, which focused much more explicitly on repeated contact and personal relationships between individuals.<sup>61</sup> Home visitors, who followed the same families over a period of time, could gauge the extent of the poverty and its causes and results; they could also provide the personal encouragement and material aid that would relieve suffering. Only within homes could the true state of the poor be catalogued and judged. On the most superficial level, home visits assured that aid went only to the truly ‘deserving’ poor and prevented ‘ruses’ played upon sometimes naive benefactors.<sup>62</sup> They also allowed visitors to encourage bourgeois standards of cleanliness and decoration; the nineteenth-century elite, after all, believed strongly that outward appearances reflected inner morality. Ladies of charity were encouraged to add small domesticating touches to the homes they visited, like, for example, putting up curtains. But on a deeper level, home

<sup>58</sup> APL, ‘Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs’ (1873), 7.

<sup>59</sup> APL, ‘Compte-Rendu de l’œuvre des pauvres malades pendant l’année 1840’.

<sup>60</sup> APL, ‘Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs’ (1873), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Woolf, ‘The Société de Charité Maternelle’, 104; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 97–8; Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, i, 324; ii, 674–6.

<sup>62</sup> Distinguishing between deserving and undeserving poor through careful observation at home was one of the principal messages of the most influential manual for home visiting, Joseph Marie de Gérando’s *Le Visiteur du pauvre* (Paris, 1826).

visits were essential to a vision of Christian charity that depended on personal understanding. ‘If in order to love the poor person’, one commentator argued, ‘it is necessary above all to understand him, what surer method is there than to go and study poverty in his home, to witness there all his secrets, all his anguish, all his bitterness?’<sup>63</sup> The poor, in turn, would see the generosity of the rich at close quarters and would cease to fear that they were looked down upon or scorned. Class conflict would be avoided through mutual understanding.<sup>64</sup> In one edifying example, a lady of charity reported being asked the incredulous question, ‘the rich suffer sometimes then?’ after returning tearfully to her visiting duties following a death in her own family.<sup>65</sup> In the face of repeated social revolution, Catholics saw a special need for this kind of social reconciliation that had women as its agents. ‘The visiting ladies are the messengers of this mission of pacification and Christian reconciliation’, read the instructions for one group in 1850, two years after the 1848 Revolution had pitted rich against poor.<sup>66</sup>

The view of Christian charity embraced and disseminated by the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* and groups like it was one that accepted social and economic inequality as immutable. The Christian populism based on equality and democracy, described by Edward Berenson as gaining credence among the working classes in the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>67</sup> was not the version promoted by elite and orthodox Catholics, who did not believe that poverty could ever be completely eliminated. Instead, they believed that Catholic philanthropy could alleviate poverty’s worst effects and promote a better understanding between rich and poor. Home visits and personal contact promoted these goals. The fortunate benefactor, as one author put it, ‘reduced the pride that comes from wealth and greatness’ while the humble recipient ‘was calmed of the passions that so naturally fermented in the breasts of those who lacked everything in the presence of the

<sup>63</sup> ‘La Société de Saint-Vincent de Paul: Compte-Rendu de ses Œuvres’, *Annales de la Charité* (1847), 563.

<sup>64</sup> Isidore Mullois, *Manuel de Charité* (Paris, 1852), 95–102.

<sup>65</sup> APL, ‘Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs’ (1879), 10.

<sup>66</sup> *Œuvre des faubourgs: instruction pour les dames visiteuses* (Paris, 1850), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830–1852* (Princeton, 1984), 38–51.

superfluities of luxury'.<sup>68</sup> Charity of this kind was as spiritually necessary to the rich as to the poor. Catholics argued that 'Christian charity' was morally superior to public welfare assistance because rather than relying on tax support, it required real sacrifices on a personal level, which gave it 'soul'.<sup>69</sup> Some clerics suggested that charitable ladies make small personal sacrifices in lifestyle — reducing the cost of a party, cutting back on household expenses, donating used clothing — on behalf of the poor. The countess d'Auberville, for example, was eulogized for travelling by bus or on foot, and for economizing on winter fires in order to donate the funds saved to the poor.<sup>70</sup> Alms, as one priest reminded the ladies in his parish, 'never impoverished anyone'.<sup>71</sup>

Most importantly, home visits allowed the ladies of charity to evaluate the spiritual needs of those they visited. 'The body of the poor person', their instructions reminded them, 'is nothing but a tangible envelope that encloses a soul made in the image of God'.<sup>72</sup> Material aid, while acknowledged as important, was only half of the charitable equation, 'a *means* for success, but never the *goal* of their pious excursions'.<sup>73</sup> Conversion of souls was more important than relief of poverty, which, by giving hope, could help make poverty bearable. 'The Christian man', wrote one Catholic author, 'sees his misery and resigns himself; the non-Christian man sees his misery and becomes enraged or overwhelmed'.<sup>74</sup> Visitors were supposed to take note of such religious and moral details as whether poor clients attended mass, refrained from work on Sundays, had undergone a religious marriage, had baptized their children, sent those children to school and catechism class, and put boys and girls to sleep in separate beds. Beyond collecting this information, the Dames de la Charité were supposed to use their understanding of, and influence with, the family to inspire deeper faith and more orthodox practice. They handed out crucifixes, medals and rosaries, along with the

<sup>68</sup> P.-A. Dufau, *Lettres à une dame sur la charité présentant le tableau complet des œuvres, associations et établissements destinés au soulagement des classes pauvres*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1847), 42.

<sup>69</sup> J.-B. Heslot, *Essai sur la question de l'extinction de la mendicité: théorie et application* (Laval, 1850), 98.

<sup>70</sup> *Manuel des Dames de la Charité*, 434.

<sup>71</sup> AAP, 5 C, St-Jean-St-François: 'Procès-verbaux des réunions mensuelles des Dames de charité', 6 Nov. 1877.

<sup>72</sup> APL, 'Rapport des travaux de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades' (1853), 9.

<sup>73</sup> *Œuvre des faubourgs*, 5 (original emphasis).

<sup>74</sup> Mullois, *Manuel de Charité*, 67.

coupons for bread and coal. At Lent they made special visits to urge their clients to fulfil their Easter duty, providing new clothes, if necessary. In all seasons of the year, they pressured them to obey Catholic sacraments: Christian marriage, baptism, confession, holy communion and, for the dying, last rites and Christian burial. They spoke of their own faith, and provided elementary instruction in Catholic doctrine.

The ideal lady of charity took a personal interest in the individuals she visited, kept note of their progress, continued her attentions after they recovered from illness, and, in the case of their death, prayed for their souls and provided 'daily bread' for the bodies and souls of their orphaned children.<sup>75</sup> The Abbé Mullois argued that ladies of charity could be more successful in regenerating religious sentiment than even nuns or priests, for whom proselytizing was their 'trade . . . but a society woman, rich, free, able to enjoy life at home, to come herself into a hospital, to give consolation to the sometimes unpleasant, poor patients, is a truly supernatural thing, divine . . . an apparition from another world'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, one lady visiting the suburban poor reported that the news that she lived near the church of the Madeleine (in the wealthy eighth arrondissement) was greeted by the overjoyed exclamation, 'But you are a Parisian!'<sup>77</sup> Another visitor obtained entrance into the household due to the illness of a child; after 'gaining their confidence' she convinced the father to receive the sacraments of baptism, communion and marriage, after which his friends, 'lost like him, allowed themselves to be touched by his exhortations and recanted their errors'.<sup>78</sup>

In evaluating their success, the members of the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* collected statistics on religious results along with numbers of visits they made and the amount of aid that they distributed. In the parish of St-Sulpice in Paris, for example, at the meeting on 3 March 1874, sixteen ladies reported 219 visits to thirty-eight clients, and listed one death, one marriage, two devotional communions, one last rite, six requests for clothes and two requests for money.<sup>79</sup> Each visitor and each parish branch kept careful administrative records not only of numbers of visits,

<sup>75</sup> For a model of such a lady, see the obituary of Madame Baudon in APL, 'Association des Dames de Charité: rapports' (1853), 25.

<sup>76</sup> Isidore Mullois, *La Charité et la misère à Paris*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1856–62), i, 265.

<sup>77</sup> APL, 'Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs' (1879), 17.

<sup>78</sup> APL, 'Rapport des travaux de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades' (1852), 7.

<sup>79</sup> AAP, 5 C, St-Sulpice: 'Œuvre des pauvres malades', 3 Mar. 1874.

funds taken in and money and goods distributed, but also of baptisms, marriages, first communions, devotional communions, confirmations, last rites, Christian burials and religious conversions, which were then published in an annual report distributed at the general meeting. These detailed records testify both to the main goals of Catholic charity and to the increasing preoccupation with record-keeping among the nineteenth-century governing classes. Seven years after their re-establishment, Étienne lauded the religious results of the Dames de la Charité with astonishing precision by citing their 31,908 visits to 13,952 individuals by two hundred active members. He recorded that 580 patients died after having received the sacraments, seventy-five marriages were blessed by the church, two entire households of both children and parents were baptized, one Jewish family and four Protestants converted, and over one hundred lapsed Catholics returned to the church.<sup>80</sup> Reports also included testimonials regarding death-bed conversions, which formed one of the primary objectives of the Dames de la Charité, since visiting the sick remained one of their most important activities. They also encouraged adults who had lived in religious ignorance since their baptism to make their first communions; in 1841, Étienne wrote admiringly that men aged in their forties, fifties and sixties had done so.<sup>81</sup> 'Animated with the deepest piety, inspired by the holiest zeal', wrote Sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité in charge of welfare in the poverty-stricken *faubourg* of St-Marcel, 'these ladies often bring religious words where, until now, they have never been heard'. Even three patients who refused nursing care from nuns were 'brought back to God' through the efforts of the *dames*. Despite, or perhaps because of, the desperate poverty of this neighbourhood, Sœur Rosalie believed that the inhabitants 'are generally well disposed to receive the advice and counsel that these ladies give them; it is extremely rare that they resist their advice'.<sup>82</sup> The Dames de la Charité defined success not by the decreasing numbers of poor but by the efforts they made to alleviate their misery — measured in numbers of visits and material aid distributed — and, most importantly, by the numbers they successfully brought back into

<sup>80</sup> APL, 'Rapport de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades pour l'année 1846 lu en janvier 1847 par M. Étienne'.

<sup>81</sup> APL, 'Compte-Rendu des travaux et des succès de l'œuvre des Dames de la Charité pendant l'année 1841'.

<sup>82</sup> APL, Sœur Rosalie to M. Étienne, 19 Dec. 1840; *ibid.*, 9 June 1840.

the Catholic fold through sacramental practice. The purpose of this charity was not to eliminate poverty, a goal which most Catholics believed impossible, but to mitigate its worst effects while getting rid of irreligion and spreading bourgeois values.

What did the clients of these zealous women think of their efforts? Here it behoves us to take a sceptical attitude towards the existing evidence, which comes entirely from the patrons rather than the poor. Even a critical reading of the records of the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* tells us little about its clients except as the 'other', whose behaviour, lifestyle and simplicity of Christian virtue were held up as mirror images of those of its patrons. In an impoverished Paris severely short on social services, it is easy to imagine poor residents developing effective strategies of co-operation and pretence in order to satisfy the insistent ladies at their doors.<sup>83</sup> James C. Scott reminds us that 'the public transcript is, to put it crudely, the *self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen'.<sup>84</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in the often hagiographic accounts of the *Dames de la Charité*, whose main purpose was primarily to encourage, inspire and warn other members, and to attract additional donations. All we can really conclude is that visits to the poor often strengthened the faith of members as much as, and probably more than, their clients. Since serving the poor, much less loving them, required unpleasant duties, it helped bring elite women, in their eyes, closer to God. Indeed, many members appear to have gained great personal and spiritual satisfaction from these visits. One who visited a consumptive mother who suddenly proclaimed her faith in God, reported:

This [conversion] touched me deeply; my poor patient became all the more dear to me; I kept this visit for the last in doing my rounds in order to fortify myself, and when, preoccupied with her condition, I started with her, I went again to see her before leaving the neighbourhood in order to compensate for the problems that I had elsewhere.<sup>85</sup>

Another reported her great satisfaction in accompanying a man to whom she had given religious instruction to church for his first confession and absolution: 'I saw him come out of the

<sup>83</sup> Barrie M. Ratcliffe develops an interesting analysis of this issue regarding the *Société de St-François de Régis* and poor marriages in his 'Popular Classes and Cohabitation in Mid Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Jl Family Hist.*, xxi (1996).

<sup>84</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> APL, 'Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs' (1879), 15.

confessional with his eyes full of tears . . . He asked me to take communion at the same time as he'.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to strengthening their own faith, these women were also taken out of their drawing rooms to neighbourhoods and homes into which they generally did not venture. Kathryn Norberg has shown that when lay confraternities first expanded during the Catholic Reformation in Grenoble, women's associations were often more 'limited, modest, and discreet' than those of men who embarked on an energetic campaign of visiting and distributing aid.<sup>87</sup> Nineteenth-century ladies of charity, however, appear to have taken the men's model as their own. As Bonnie Smith has written for the charitable women of the Nord, 'far from being cloistered', they 'moved energetically in public'.<sup>88</sup> During the Revolution of 1848, Étienne praised the courage of members who 'mapped out a path in order to arrive next to the bed of [their] poor patients, blind to the dangers that threatened [them]'.<sup>89</sup> In 1872, when the Dames de la Charité extended their work to the outer suburbs of Paris, 'still bloodied by the massacres of the Commune', these 'women of the world, sometimes losing their shoes in the mud, braved the zone of unspeakable hovels and pigsties, in order to console their abandoned inhabitants'.<sup>90</sup> The obituary of Madame Baudon, known within the association as 'la petite dame', cited her work with a dying sweeper named Catherine that took her into a building where 'the stairway was so dark that she had to grope the wall in order to find the rope that served as a banister'.<sup>91</sup> In addition to overcoming physical and geographical barriers, women visitors often reported encountering 'rude words' and 'humiliating remarks'.<sup>92</sup>

Organizing, soliciting funds, visiting: all took assertive, self-confident individuals, like the two cited in this 1840 report: 'Madame Savouré is incomparable. Madame d'Auberville is intrepid; she braves all weather'.<sup>93</sup> The foundress, Vicountess Le Vavasseur, was an especially active woman, who 'when Paris

<sup>86</sup> M. G. Darboy, *Statistique religieuse du diocèse de Paris: mémoire sur l'état présent du diocèse* (Paris, 1856), 242–3.

<sup>87</sup> Norberg, *Rich and Poor in Grenoble*, 26–31.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, 136.

<sup>89</sup> APL, M. Étienne to Dames de la Charité, compte-rendu, 26 Jan. 1849.

<sup>90</sup> *Annales des Dames de la Charité de St-Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1895), 24.

<sup>91</sup> APL, 'Madame Baudon, par une dame des pauvres malades', in 'Association des Dames de Charité: rapports' (1853), 17.

<sup>92</sup> Dufau, *Lettres à une dame sur la charité*, 49.

<sup>93</sup> APL, Soeur Rosalie to a Dame de la Charité, Dec. 1840.



awakened, had already been up several hours; she had prayed, meditated, attended the first mass in her parish . . . then she began her voluminous correspondence, supervised her house-keeping, and then went to her dear patients'.<sup>94</sup> Upon refounding the *Œuvre des pauvres malades*, she began a regular correspondence with Étienne and personally visited the priests and the Filles de la Charité in the parishes where she wished to establish branches in order to gain their support before turning to the time-consuming job of fund-raising and recruitment.<sup>95</sup> For some elite women, charity work was a method of escaping the confines of domesticity, and of becoming active in the service of others without joining religious orders. Many of the women who were most involved in this association appear to have been widows, who were assumed to have more time and 'liberty of action' to devote to charity.<sup>96</sup> Charitable works could also help provide spiritual consolation for their grief. The Marchioness Le Bouteiller, for example, began nursing the sick and infirm after the death of her young daughter, and intensified her efforts after losing her husband, father, mother and sister shortly thereafter. After the Revolution of 1848 inspired her to co-found the *Œuvre de Ste-Geneviève* in order to proselytize in the Paris suburbs, it 'became her only occupation, her only joy'. Likewise, Madame Droitecourt, widowed at twenty-two, 'adopted the neighbourhood of La Villette', and after raising a son to the priesthood, joined the Filles de la Charité.<sup>97</sup>

#### IV

##### A PARTNERSHIP AMONG WOMEN

The work of the Dames de la Charité was also greatly strengthened, materially and spiritually, by their partnership with the Filles de la Charité, with whom they had been associated since their origins in the seventeenth century. After founding the Dames de la Charité to minister to the poor and the sick, Vincent de Paul and his associate, the widow Louise de Marillac, soon discovered that upper-class women, particularly in Paris, were

<sup>94</sup> *Manuel des Dames de la Charité*, 408.

<sup>95</sup> APL, 'Correspondance de Madame Levasseur avec Monsieur Étienne' (1840).

<sup>96</sup> C. A. Ozanam, *Mission et devoirs de la femme chrétienne au sein de la société* (Paris, 1854), 280.

<sup>97</sup> *Manuel des Dames de la Charité*, 419–25, 427–8.

reluctant to engage in the kind of hands-on care that de Paul had envisioned. Instead, the physical labour of caring for the impoverished and the sick became the province of lower-class women whom de Marillac recruited into the Filles de la Charité, while the Dames de la Charité retained the lighter work of visiting and proselytizing. The Filles de la Charité soon became a type of women's religious order that was new to the Catholic church in the seventeenth century. These were uncloistered women who took annual vows, were dedicated to the active service of the unfortunate everywhere, and provided chiefly hospital and home care.<sup>98</sup> They quickly became an accepted institution that gained in both numbers and prestige. By 1700, according to Colin Jones, the sister of charity, as she was commonly known, was considered 'patient, saintly, laborious, discreet, committed — and tough',<sup>99</sup> a description that endured for at least the next two hundred years. Re-established immediately after the Revolution and authorized by Napoleon in 1800, the Filles de la Charité remained the largest single female congregation in France throughout the nineteenth century, growing from 1,600 members in 1808 to 7,000 in 1861 and 9,100 in 1878.<sup>100</sup>

In the nineteenth century, however, unlike the seventeenth, the roles of Vincent de Paul's daughters and his ladies were reversed. Originally considered an auxiliary to the confraternities of pious and wealthy ladies, the Filles de la Charité laboured in their shadow and under their protection.<sup>101</sup> But by 1840, when the Dames de la Charité were re-established, the Filles de la Charité were a national and international institution that had not

<sup>98</sup> This was not an initiative taken without considerable difficulty. The attempt of women to organize themselves along the same lines as men in active religious orders (for example the Jesuits) during the Catholic Reformation was met with great anxiety on the part of the Catholic church, which preferred to see religious women cloistered. Vincent de Paul got around the restrictions partly by denying that the Filles de la Charité were a religious order at all, but rather a mere confraternity: members did not initially wear habits; they could go home on family visits; and they took only annual vows that did not have the force of law. The Filles de la Charité pioneered the type of female religious congregation that became commonplace during the nineteenth century: women dedicated to the active service of others, belonging to a centralized order, and responsible to a superior general. For more on their origins, see Colin Jones, *The Charitable Imperative: Hospitals and Nursing in Ancien Régime and Revolutionary France* (London, 1989), ch. 3; Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal, 1990), 79–94.

<sup>99</sup> Jones, *Charitable Imperative*, 89.

<sup>100</sup> These figures are for France only, and do not include the growing international membership: see Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, 334–5.

<sup>101</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 90.

only survived the Revolution but had expanded greatly under the new religious, economic and social conditions of the early nineteenth century. The reconstituted *dames* first worked under the direction of the already legendary Sœur Rosalie Rendu, the Fille de la Charité who ran welfare services for the impoverished *faubourg* of St-Marcel. The countess d'Auberville, one of the original twelve members, was described as the 'friend and pupil' of Rendu.<sup>102</sup> Sœur Rosalie was full of compliments for the goodwill and good works of the ladies, writing to Étienne: 'The punctual visits that they have made [to the poor] have resulted in all the good effects that one could wish for. The material aid that they give to them with intelligence and with a truly maternal charity does inexpressible good to these poor families'.<sup>103</sup> Étienne, in turn, reminded the ladies frequently of the need to respect the experience of the Filles de la Charité to whom 'they humbly loaned their support', and to whom they were 'to act in all things according to their advice and under their direction'.<sup>104</sup> The Dames de la Charité received their visiting assignments and aid coupons from the Filles de la Charité and informed them if they had to be absent or if clients needed follow-up visits. Ladies who overstepped their bounds were carefully monitored by the watchful and more experienced nuns, as, for example, Madame Baudon, whose attempts to give out cash (five francs a visit) gained her the popularity of the poor but the disapproval of the local sisters, to whom she instead agreed to donate the money for a more prudent distribution.<sup>105</sup> The Filles de la Charité, who lived in the neighbourhoods they served, had a much more intimate knowledge of the personalities and the needs of the poor residents, as well as more experience dealing with illness and disability. The social origins of the Filles de la Charité were also much closer to their clients. In 1855, only 4 per cent of the membership was noble, 27 per cent was bourgeois, 33 per cent came from artisan and shopkeeping classes, 28 per cent was of peasant origin and

<sup>102</sup> *Annales des Dames de la Charité*, 21. On Sœur Rosalie Rendu, one of the best-known sisters of charity of the nineteenth century, see Fernand Laudet, *La Sœur Rosalie, 1787-1856* (Paris, 1911); Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 903-7.

<sup>103</sup> APL, Sœur Rosalie to M. Étienne, 9 June 1840.

<sup>104</sup> APL, 'Association des Dames de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul pour la visite des pauvres malades' (1844); 'Œuvre des pauvres malades' (1863), 4.

<sup>105</sup> APL, 'Rapport des travaux de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades' (1863), 15. Assistance to the poor was always given in kind rather than money, usually by the distribution of coupons for food, fuel, medicine, bedlinen and clothing.

8 per cent was working or servant class.<sup>106</sup> The Dames de la Charité, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly noble and bourgeois.

Part of the work of the Filles de la Charité in the nineteenth century was leveraging the energy and money of these upper-class laywomen volunteers. The rules of the Filles de la Charité discouraged direct fund-raising, particularly door-to-door collections, preferring 'pure, free, and spontaneous charity' that would not require too much potential worldly corruption.<sup>107</sup> But judging from the death notices of many nuns, they actively encouraged wealthy Catholic ladies to donate time and money. Sœur Gabrielle Ducoing, for example, was eulogized for her ability to knock on the doors of the rich on behalf of the poor. A young mother wrote of her:

It was she who taught me to love and console the poor. I can still see her entering my room one morning when I lay in bed recovering from the diversions of the previous evening; a vestige of emotion that flushed her face embarrassed me; I thought I had outraged her by my laziness, but far from it; the most ardent charity shone in her eyes.

Sœur Gabrielle then convinced this leisured lady to donate three hundred francs to help poor families in the parish. Sœur Olivier, who worked in the wealthy parish of St-Germain l'Auxerrois, was reportedly too timid to ask directly for money on behalf of the poor, but 'spoke of their suffering with such heart that purses came undone by themselves'. And to Sœur Françoise Gendry on the Île St-Louis,

charity gave a kind of supremacy to our Mother; if the poor did all that she wished, the rich rarely resisted the charms of her virtue . . . she exercised a surprising influence over the people who approached her . . . the ladies rushed to her call, the meeting days were for them holidays.<sup>108</sup>

In a Paris that was severely short of parish clergy, the Filles de la Charité acted as ministers not only to the poor, but also to the wealthy Catholic women who volunteered in their parishes. Laywomen, in turn, gained status and power through their association with religious women.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, 614.

<sup>107</sup> *Collection de lettres circulaires émanées des différentes maisons de Sœurs de la Charité en France* (Paris), 1 Jan. 1876, 5–6.

<sup>108</sup> For all three examples, see *ibid.*: 19 July 1871, 24; 1 Jan. 1862, 159; 1 Jan. 1875, 34.

<sup>109</sup> On the relationship between lay and religious women in general, see Mills, 'Negotiating the Divide'; Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995).

## V

## EXPANDING PARIS, EXPANDING CHARITY

Ladies of charity also provided the nuns with the necessary financial support to expand their services. Although the Filles de la Charité and now the Dames de la Charité were established in most Paris parishes by mid century, the same was not true for the rapidly expanding suburbs just outside the city walls. Here overcrowding was even more extreme and the shortage of priests even more acute than in Paris proper. The Revolution of 1848, furthermore, had demonstrated the fragility of any alliance between the church and the popular classes, which had completely broken down by the June Days, when Archbishop Affre was accidentally slain on the barricades, crucifix in hand.<sup>110</sup> And beyond the city walls, many churchmen wondered if ‘it was still a French and Christian country’. From their perspective, churches in the suburbs were deserted, children were raised with no morals, and the working classes were susceptible to radical political ideas like communism.<sup>111</sup> After the June Days, the frightened elite, led by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, who became Napoleon III, turned even more strongly to the Catholic church as a partner in maintaining social order. The Catholic revival of the 1830s and 1840s had transformed many in the governing classes, especially women, into true believers, and the church, as an institution, had become better integrated into the political order.<sup>112</sup>

In 1849, two Dames de la Charité, the Marchioness Le Bouteiller and Madame de Montal, proposed a new branch of the Œuvres des pauvres malades, named the Œuvre Ste-Geneviève after Paris’s patron saint, to focus on the working-class suburbs. The Œuvre Ste-Geneviève dedicated itself to providing the financial resources to support new establishments of the Filles de la Charité outside the city limits for the ‘moralization and relief of the inhabitants’.<sup>113</sup> By 1856, sixteen such houses had been opened, directed by fifty-eight nuns who visited fifteen thousand poor.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, i, *From the Revolution to the Third Republic*, trans. John Dingle (New York, 1961), 258–9.

<sup>111</sup> Mullois, *La Charité et la misère*, i, 276.

<sup>112</sup> See Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, i, 266–7; Gibson, *Social History of French Catholicism*, 199–200; Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris*, 164–75.

<sup>113</sup> *Annales des Dames de la Charité*, 24.

<sup>114</sup> *Vie de M. Étienne*, 331–2.

In 1859, when Paris annexed most of the neighbouring suburbs, nearly doubling its population, twelve houses were incorporated into the city's poor-relief network.<sup>115</sup> The Œuvre Ste-Geneviève continued to sponsor charity establishments outside the new city limits throughout the Second Empire, one of the few groups to do so.<sup>116</sup>

In part, the new interest in the suburbs resulted from the demographic changes affecting Paris during the rebuilding undertaken by Napoleon III and his Prefect of the Seine, Baron Haussmann, in the 1850s and 1860s. As developers razed slums to erect new apartment buildings and grand boulevards, the poor were pushed further east and north as well as outside the city limits, resulting in greater class segregation accompanied by continuing high population growth.<sup>117</sup> Like the population they served, the Filles de la Charité saw their greatest growth in the 1850s, a decade in which they established as many new houses as in the previous fifty years.<sup>118</sup> The women active in the Œuvre Ste-Geneviève, however, did not follow personally the poor or the Filles de la Charité outside Paris. Instead they acted strictly as fund-raisers, raising an annual sum of fifty francs each in their home parishes, which went to support suburban parishes. Home visits in this case were accomplished by the Filles de la Charité and, on occasion, a local parish branch of the Œuvre des pauvres malades, not the Parisian benefactors. The Œuvre Ste-Geneviève represented instead a means of transferring wealth, in the form of Catholic relief services, from the increasingly bourgeois and elite neighbourhoods of the new Paris to the impoverished parishes beyond. Participants argued that their intervention had been critical. 'In these same suburbs of Paris', wrote Étienne in the 1864 annual report, 'that are often quite rightly depicted as seats of corruption and ignorance, today we see religion honoured and the sacraments attended. Little by little the population undergoes a complete transformation'.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> APL, 'Assemblée générale de l'Œuvre de Sainte-Geneviève: rapport par M. Étienne' (1863), 5.

<sup>116</sup> Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse*, 284.

<sup>117</sup> On the rebuilding of Paris, see David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York, 1995); David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, 1958).

<sup>118</sup> Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, 316. This was the case throughout France, not just in the Paris suburbs.

<sup>119</sup> APL, 'Assemblée générale de l'Œuvre de Sainte-Geneviève: rapport par M. Étienne' (1864), 9.

Étienne's confidence notwithstanding, there is little evidence of such a transformation despite the proliferation of religious social services for the poor. Church structures still lagged behind population growth. Despite an increase in Paris's population of over 700,000 (from 1,825,274 to 2,536,834 inhabitants) between 1866 and 1896, only three new parishes were established, raising the total to sixty-nine.<sup>120</sup> Most of the population growth occurred in the outer arrondissements and the suburbs. Within the city limits working-class Parisians had become increasingly anticlerical. In 1872, 13,900 Parisians declared that they had no religion at all,<sup>121</sup> and the events of the Paris Commune reflected hostility towards Catholic institutions. The Communards declared the separation of church and state on 2 April 1871, and suppressed the religious affairs budget. During the crisis many Filles de la Charité were harassed and insulted, and most of their houses, hospitals and schools were taken over. After the entrance of French government troops into Paris in May, Communards arrested and shot priests at random, culminating in the execution of Archbishop Darboy.<sup>122</sup>

The events of the Commune, shocking as they were to Catholics, resulted in the appearance of yet another branch of the Œuvre des pauvres malades — the Œuvre des faubourgs.<sup>123</sup> Even as some Filles de la Charité were expelled during the Commune, many Dames de la Charité remained active, visiting the poor as if nothing had changed, at least until the shelling forced them out: 'The general meetings were held as if in the quietest times, and the ladies attended them in great numbers, without allowing themselves to be frightened by the noise of the shells that passed above their heads . . . not a single one of these valiant women left her post'.<sup>124</sup> Once peace was restored, some of these women decided to extend the work of the Œuvres des pauvres malades, including home visits, to the 'gulfs of misery that surround the luxury of Paris like a belt'. In areas like Belleville, Glacière and

<sup>120</sup> Daniel, *L'Équipement paroissial d'un diocèse urbain*, 176–8.

<sup>121</sup> Louis Girard, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris: la deuxième république et le second empire, 1848–1870* (Paris, 1981), 279.

<sup>122</sup> Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, i, 322–3.

<sup>123</sup> This charity should not be confused with another of the same name, founded after the Revolution of 1848 in the sixth, eighth and twelfth arrondissements to pay school fees and provide material aid for the poor.

<sup>124</sup> *Vie de M. Étienne*, 528–9.

Butte-aux-Cailles, they argued that physical and moral conditions bred revolt:

The crowding of families in these long and narrow alleys divided into huts that resemble the roofs for pigs, the filth, the foul odour of rags, the strange appearance of the inhabitants, give to this corner of the capital an unbelievable aspect, and one can easily imagine these miserable descendants, on a day of riots, like the barbarous hordes, with hatred and lust in their hearts. How can we be astonished, when we know the conditions of their life, when we know that they lack the most elementary notions of morality and religion, and that among the majority of them there is nothing developed except material appetites?<sup>125</sup>

The transience of the population and the backlash towards workers after the Commune, including the arrest of many household heads, increased the miseries of much of this population. At the suggestion of the archdeacon of Paris, seven ladies opened the first chapter in Belleville and began to visit thirty families. By 1879, 104 ladies of charity enrolled in the *Œuvre des faubourgs* looked after 3,500 individuals, making twenty-four thousand visits in that year alone.<sup>126</sup>

The advent of the Third Republic, however, marked a watershed in Catholic charity, not because such charity diminished, but because the Republican government sought to end the public-private partnership that had characterized welfare policy since the beginning of the century. In the 1880s, the government removed religious personnel from welfare offices, hospitals and primary schools, and stopped subsidies to religious organizations. Religious congregations like the *Filles de la Charité* continued their activity as social workers, nurses and teachers, but now they did so entirely under church auspices, transforming their quasi-public system of charity into a private one in an increasingly politicized atmosphere. Lay associations like the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* also continued their work, but entirely in the private sphere. To many Catholics, in fact, the *Dames de la Charité* appeared more necessary than ever. Without access to public money, their fund-raising activities were invaluable, and without religious personnel in public hospitals, schools and welfare offices, home visits were an even more important outlet for religious evangelization. Far from being eclipsed by changing

<sup>125</sup> APL, '*Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs*' (1873), 6–7.

<sup>126</sup> APL, '*Œuvre des pauvres malades dans les faubourgs*' (1880), 2.



public attitudes towards welfare, the Dames de la Charité were bolstered by them.<sup>127</sup>

## VI

### CONCLUSION

Catherine Duprat writes, in her monumental two-volume study of early nineteenth-century French charity, that by 1840 ‘the age of philanthropic inquiry was over’, the social reform movements inspired by the Enlightenment and the Revolution having virtually all been replaced by charity groups — the largest and most vibrant among them Catholic — devoted to the moralization of the lower classes rather than the transformation of society.<sup>128</sup> No group exemplifies this shift better than the *Œuvre des pauvres malades*, re-established in that very year and expanding rapidly throughout Paris and its suburbs by 1880. Its success depended on a number of factors, some internal to the organization and others caused by the realities of mid nineteenth-century Paris. The *Œuvre des pauvres malades*, much like the active religious congregation of the nineteenth century, combined a strong centralized administration with the flexibility to respond to specific needs at the parish level. It allowed elite women, increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, outlets for increased sociability and public action that simultaneously reinforced their social position. Its partnership with the *Filles de la Charité* provided it with prestige and authority and an already established network for local action. And finally, it had no lack of clients for the generalized material aid that it provided. Unlike many other women’s associations that specialized in particular social problems, the Dames de la Charité did not discriminate among the ever-increasing poor in nineteenth-century Paris. The rapidity of their expansion, in fact, only serves to highlight the extent to which Parisian welfare authorities became dependent on this kind of private and religious assistance as the city burst at the seams with new immigrants, and massive rebuilding projects shifted and impoverished much of the population. Between the work of such voluntary charities like the *Œuvre des pauvres malades* and the

<sup>127</sup> As Hazel Mills argues, the relationship between Catholic women’s charity before the Third Republic and the emergence of the maternalistic welfare state after 1880 needs far more research and analysis: see Mills, ‘“La Charité est une Mère”’, 185–6.

<sup>128</sup> Duprat, *Usage et pratiques de la philanthropie*, ii, 1240.

subsistence-level wages offered to religious orders like the Filles de la Charité, women's unpaid labour — in the form of fundraising, visiting, nursing and distributing aid — was arguably the single most important pillar of urban welfare support until the Third Republic.

In a city increasingly segregated between rich and poor, the home visits of the Dames de la Charité provided one of the few ways in which classes still intermingled, notwithstanding the obvious inequality of roles between patrons and clients. This kind of charity, which promised social reconciliation and a small redistribution of wealth without questioning the rightness of class division, was particularly suited to the conservative political regimes, like the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, in which it flourished. Through groups like the Œuvre des pauvres malades, the wealth of the upper classes, as well as the time and energy of its women, was leveraged on behalf of the poor, without much social critique or consequences. Dedicated to alleviating material suffering and regenerating religious faith and practice, the Dames de la Charité believed that misery and irreligion bred revolt and disorder, but unlike charity women in nineteenth-century Britain, for example, they did not use their increasing knowledge of the conditions of the lower classes to develop schemes to attack the social, political or economic roots of that misery. Instead they concentrated on developing personal relationships, which they saw as the key to the religious conversion that would lead to social reconciliation. Like the women enrolled in lay confraternities in seventeenth-century Grenoble analysed by Kathryn Norberg, the nineteenth-century Dames de la Charité developed 'a highly spiritualized vision of the poor' which displaced 'the more secular view characteristic of the [previous] century'.<sup>129</sup>

It was, in fact, the same vision. No model more important to these groups — or to the nineteenth-century French church — than that of the Catholic Reformation. The grass-roots response among lay Catholics to the loss of privilege and support during the French Revolution was a return to institutions first developed during the last great period of religious challenge, the Catholic Reformation, of which the confraternity and the active religious order were among the most vital. During the nineteenth century,

<sup>129</sup> Norberg, *Rich and Poor in Grenoble*, 24.

not only were both reinvented, they were heavily feminized. The two associations most important to Parisian welfare efforts in the nineteenth century, the Filles de la Charité and the Dames de la Charité — both originally founded by the towering figure of seventeenth-century Catholic charity, Vincent de Paul — vastly expanded to respond to the new economic and demographic needs of the modern city. While men's associations and men's religious orders also entered the post-Revolutionary charitable arena, their work remained more controversial and their numbers more restrained. Women, perceived as apolitical despite the fundamentally conservative nature of the religious charity they practised, flew under the radar of church–state conflict, which allowed them a larger scope for action.

The reliance on seventeenth-century models of charity to breathe new life into Catholicism two centuries later proved a mixed blessing for the nineteenth-century French church. On the one hand, it allowed them to unleash a tremendous amount of energy — largely feminine — to the project of renewing parish structures and reaching new populations. For Catholics, losing ground in the nineteenth century, especially among urban populations, the widespread extent of religiously sponsored charity work in the capital city was a sign of renewal and a source of optimism.<sup>130</sup> Yet, on the other hand, it also trapped the church in outmoded social models when industrialization and democratization began to transform both Paris and France. By the end of the Second Empire, the diocese of Paris was polarized between a nucleus of fervent Catholics worshipping in packed churches, primarily located in the wealthy western areas of the city, and a larger majority of nominal Catholics, increasingly detached from religious belief and institutions, if not outright anticlerical.<sup>131</sup> The charitable work of the Dames de la Charité may have gained them, and by extension the church, some measure of popular respect, but it certainly did nothing to contradict the popular perception that the Catholic church remained intimately linked with conservative economics and politics. Whatever the actual impact of these efforts on the lives of the poor in nineteenth-century Paris — one that the existing sources allow no real way of measuring — Parisian lower-class support for the church

<sup>130</sup> Horvath-Peterson, 'Abbé Georges Darboy's *Statistique religieuse*', 418.

<sup>131</sup> Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse*, 484.

diminished rather than increased in the forty-year period between 1840 and 1880.

Within this same time frame, however, women became one of the church's most important constituents. Through association with Catholicism, elite women increased their independence and stature. During the nineteenth century, women, unlike men, had few outlets for sociability, for independent action or for public power; lay associations provided them with all three within the confines of a male-dominated institution. Women who joined these groups used them to bend the bonds of domesticity without challenging its ideology, while gaining a sense of personal and religious self-worth. The poor, on the other hand, they treated as passive vessels for the transmission of bourgeois and religious values that upheld the status quo. In short, the urban philanthropy practised by the Dames de la Charité empowered the *dames* more than the *pauvres malades*. Based on a world-view that was conservative, religious and personal, that kind of charity nevertheless energized Catholic women, who believed that through their 'sweet and modest' mission they could 'heal a century and save a people'.<sup>132</sup> By 1862, twenty-two years after its re-establishment, the thirty-eight parish associations of the Œuvre des pauvres malades located in Paris had recorded over one million visits to the poor<sup>133</sup> — surely making the charitable lady among the most ubiquitous public figures in the nineteenth-century city that most epitomized the modern age.

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<sup>132</sup> 'Courrier des Œuvres: Œuvre de la Miséricorde en faveur des pauvres honteux, rapport présenté à l'assemblée générale du 18 avril 1865', *Annales de la Charité* (1865), 747.

<sup>133</sup> APL, '13<sup>e</sup> Compte-Général rendu de l'Œuvre des pauvres malades du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 1840 au 31 Décembre 1861'.