



**Convent Refuges for Disgraced Girls and Women in
Nineteenth-Century France**

Ann Dring Daughtry

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**Department of History
University of Adelaide**

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SUMMARY

This thesis describes a little-known area of French religious and social history, the guardianship and moral re-training given by certain religious orders to women and girls - designated as "repentant" - who had been earning their living by prostitution, or were suspected of having done so. Young girls and children considered polluted by association with morally undesirable surroundings were also accepted for treatment by most of the congregations, particularly in the second half of the century. The chapters deal with the following subjects:

I Christian moral theology relating to prostitution and illicit sexual union; the early refuges in France, and their unchanging nature.

II Society's attitude expressed in concrete terms - the regulation system and the prison for prostitutes - and in intellectual terms, as it appeared in the work of two influential social commentators and certain major figures in contemporary French literature.

III - V A description of the foundresses and activities of five congregations established between 1800 and 1852 which set up convent refuges, including the major order devoted to this work, N.D. de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers.

VI - VIII The life inside the refuge as it may be inferred from the spiritual climate and religious exercises; the background of the penitents and their use of the convent as either a home or a temporary shelter; the ways in which income was raised to support the institutions under study.

Conclusion: Theology has a very great influence on culture, even after the religion which produced it is no longer widely believed in. The particular application of theology which brought the convent refuges into being was a combination of mercy and life-denying pessimism which resulted in an attempt to infantilise the subjects and keep them in the convent's care until death, not as a punishment but as a means of saving their souls. Unfortunately this appears to have resulted in only a fraction of the destitute women and girls taken in being able to profit from the shelter offered.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of the degree.

9.9.91.

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I wish to express my thanks for the help and guidance given to me by various people during the long time which this thesis has taken to complete.

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Although the congregation of the Mother House of the Bon Pasteur was unable to help my research in France, their Australian house at Abbotsford has given me invaluable assistance, for which I am sincerely grateful.

In France, besides what I owe to the unfailing courtesy of the staff of the departmental archives of La Mayenne, under the direction of M. Joël Surcouf, and those the departmental archives of Maine et Loire, I am indebted to Professor Alain Corbin and his pupil, Dr Jacques Termeau, for making me feel welcome as a fellow scholar.

Finally I acknowledge with thanks and affection the help received from the four remaining sisters of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux, resident at Pian, and in particular that of Sr. Marie du Sacré-Coeur, whose interest in this thesis and its writer has gone well beyond the bounds of courtesy.

Convent Refuges for Sexually Disgraced Girls and Women in Nineteenth Century France

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis owes its existence initially to an appeal made by Dr A.J.B. Parent Duchâtelet in the last chapter of his major work, *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* (1836). Having chosen to describe *maisons de refuge* at the end of Volume II, Parent compared the severe discipline of the one establishment known to him, which he called "Le Bon Pasteur", with the benevolent system of a provincial house run by a working-class foundress, for whose phenomenal success at reforming young prostitutes he had only second-hand evidence. Yet he believed in his information so strongly that he wrote:

Among those who are counted benefactors of the human race, are there many as meritorious as the venerable foundress in question? I like to think that the example which she has given to the world will not be forgotten, and that the house at Laval...will serve as a model for all those which may subsequently be established.¹

Parent had burned himself out by the time he reached the last chapters of *De la Prostitution*, and died shortly after its completion. He had therefore not had time to verify all his facts. According to him the establishment at Laval was run communally; the women taken in had built their own dwelling and lived happy, healthy lives there, undisturbed by any but the most undemanding of religious exercises. Few left except with reluctance, at the demand of their families. What had become of this glorious enterprise? I could find no evidence that it had had imitators. Surmising that, because of the foundress' vulgar origins it had been suppressed by hostile elements within its local society, I decided to investigate and bring to light its surprisingly advanced methods of reform. In order to throw these into sharp contrast, I also intended to study the Parisian Maison du Bon Pasteur, which had been closed at some date prior to 1857, according to the editors of the second edition of *De la Prostitution*. I wondered to find no evidence of any study done on either of the refuges in question, historical or

¹ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, J.B. Bailliere, Paris, 2nd Ed., 1857, Vol. II, p.389.

otherwise, particularly since I was assured from France that the archives of La Mayenne, in which Laval is situated, had survived undamaged. However, I was not sorry to think that I might be the first to uncover what must have been an unusual experiment in redemptive social work. My aim was to produce a very specialised, intensive study.

I realise now that I was led by optimism rather than reason. I was convinced that Parent would not have praised the Laval house so warmly without strong evidence, and therefore, one in France, I decided to consult his notes. Surprised to find no trace of them in either the French National Library or Archives, I approached the family itself. In Paris one of its members, who had a passion for family records, received me kindly, although I had been warned that he had rejected other historians. Perhaps because of my genuine admiration for his distinguished ancestor, he showed me the catalogue of all the documents kept in one of the family's country houses. Three bundles of notes were mentioned as being among these, but when they were sent for on my behalf it turned out - after a very long interval - that they no longer existed. The whole of the Parent-Duchâtelet family archives, covering four hundred years, had been mysteriously mislaid in the 1950's, when the house in which they were stored had undergone extensive renovations. This great loss had been kept secret from the rest of the family until my request to see some actual documents revealed the absence of any. Thus the proposed thesis, which might have developed into a biography of Parent-Duchatelet, had to continue without any help from him.

To come to the point, I found that the house at Laval - Miséricorde - still functioned, as did the Bon Pasteur of which Parent had written, but their archives had not been removed to any dépôt open to public scrutiny, nor was I able to gain access to enough documents from them alone on which to base a thesis. About half-way through my period of research in France, in 1985, I realised that although in response to my letters from Australia the convents had promised to help me "*de tout notre possible*", my arrival in the flesh produced a very limited number of documents and never the registers or any letters regarding the former inmates. The sisters seemed universally

wary of investigations by an outsider, as if their view was still clouded by memories of the hostility engendered between the congregations and the Third Republic at the turn of the century. As the practices within their houses had remained very similar to those of the seventeenth century until the 1940's at least, this idea is not so far-fetched as it seems. In any case, I found that until Vatican II the Miséricorde de Laval, which I had destined to be the main subject of my study, had always been run on conventual lines, with the kind of religious exercises and penances which Parent-Duchâtelet had deplored firmly in favour from its foundation: he had been misled as to its methods. It appeared to me therefore that I must either choose another subject for my thesis or attempt to make a suitable academic offering out of mere gleanings.

This led me to consider the question of why so very little had been written on the subject of the convent refuges in France, where so much has been produced regarding the history of women and of religion. My conclusion was that it was the fact that these establishments dealt with prostitutes which had cut them off from research, particularly from research into ecclesiastical history, of which their study forms a legitimate part.² In his preface to *Les Filles de Noce*, Alain Corbin is clear that French historians at least have rejected the study of prostitution, condemning it as unchanging and therefore unhistorical.³ In an article written for J-P. Aron's *Misérable et Glorieuse* in 1980 he goes even further. The temptation is great for French historians, he says, to throw the prostitute out of the field of women's history. "The trade in sex, imposed by the male, full of masculine fantasies, frozen in its immutable forms, could not concern the evolution of women's destiny except very marginally. To study it appears to suggest an acceptance of stereotypes born of sexual repression rather than facts of everyday life."⁴ Corbin himself rejects this attitude and inclines to that expressed by contemporary Anglo-Saxon historians, whose studies have succeeded in relating

² I except Charles Chauvin, whose thesis *Eglise et Prostitution: enquête historique et perspectives pastorales*, presented to the University of Strasburg in 1973 is unique in its field, as far as I know.

³ Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce: misère sexuelle et prostitution aux 19e et 20e siècles*, Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1978.

⁴ From the essay "La prostituée" in *Misérable et glorieuse; la femme du XIXe siècle*, J-P. Aron (ed), Fayard, 1980, p.41.

prostitution intimately to the social expression of male power and the expansion of capitalism.

The question of prostitution began in interest female historians as early as 1970. Documentary evidence of a personal nature was found to be so meagre that scholars had to base their research on police or municipal archives, or accounts kept by charitable organisations dealing with the very poor, yet the results were fruitful. Over the next ten years Judith Walkowitz, Frances Finnegan and Ruth Rosen in particular published powerful and convincing studies covering the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which showed that prostitution is not a static, historically useless phenomenon but faithfully mirrors social change in areas particularly relevant to the family and to the working classes.⁵ In particular Walkowitz's study of the English attempt to control the spread of syphilis by introducing the French regulation system showed clearly that a historian can draw conclusions of a very wide scope from the study of the latter phenomenon, which was an accepted feature of continental society. In the last twenty-seven years women historians have demonstrated clearly the anti-female bias of the official treatment of public women by the modern state, its injustice, its assumption that the prostitute is not an equal, its willingness to punish by imprisonment an act which is not an offence at law. They have also demonstrated that fluctuations in the severity with which control is enforced also indicate that strictness or laxity towards the prostitute can demonstrate the anxieties of the society in question, its concern with its own degeneration and sickness.

As Corbin says in the preface to his extremely well documented study of prostitution and sexual poverty in the 19th and 20th centuries in France, the historian

⁵ J.K. Walkowitz, "'We are not Beasts of the Field': prostitution and the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1869-1886" in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, eds, May Hartman and Lois Banner.

"The Making of an Outcast Group" in *A Widening Sphere: changing roles of Victorian women*, ed. Martha Vicinus, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977.

Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.

F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: a study of Victorian prostitutes in York*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1979.

R. Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

will find the figure of the prostitute "standing at the crossroads of all anxieties". He describes his essay not as a thesis but as an opening of perspectives, a long and thoughtful look at male behaviour - particularly in the form taken by the *système réglementaire* - offered for the consideration of his colleagues whose indifference to this field of study he deploras⁶

Yet even Corbin fails to distinguish religious anxiety among those surrounding the prostitute at the crossroads. In his shortened version of Parent-Duchâtelet's classic work he omits the last section "On the repentance of prostitutes" completely, without explanation, an illustration of the phenomenon that of all the typologies used by the relatively few historians of prostitution today, that related to religious experience has been completely ignored. The asylums for the sexually disgraced women which were a feature of religious culture in Europe since the twelfth century have attracted far less attention than the regulation system which was only made official in the nineteenth. Frances Finnegan is a notable exception, although the York Refuge to which she devotes a whole chapter was not run by members of the Roman Catholic Church. Colin Jones' article on the creation and fortunes of the Bon Pasteur of Montpellier does take a Catholic refuge as its subject, but the nature and transition of authority is its theme rather than a consideration of the underlying motives for the actions he describes.⁷ Both he and Judith Godden, writing about Catholic and Protestant asylums in Sydney, are more interested in class relationships between the women who patronised or staffed these institutions than in relating their motives to their religious beliefs.⁸ Also, the treatment given to the inmates of these shelters is assumed by all

⁶ Apart from Erica-Maria Benabou, female historians in France have avoided the study of prostitution, as have almost all men. One of Corbin's pupils, Jacques Termeau, is a notable exception. His thesis on the provincial experience of prostitution in central Western France was published in 1986 by Les Editions Cénomane as *Maisons closes de Province*. The mighty *Annales*, where one might have hoped for a larger harvest, has published only two articles: Jacques Rossiaud's "Prostitution, jeunesse et sexualité dans les villes de la France du sud-est au 15e siècle", *Annales*, 1976, no. 2, and "La prostitution florentine au XVe siècle", by Richard C. Trexler, *Annales*, 1981, no. 6.

⁷ C. Jones, "Prostitution and the Ruling Class in 18th-century Montpellier", *History Workshop*, Issue 6, Autumn 1978.

⁸ J. Godden, "Sectarianism and Purity within the Woman's Sphere: Sydney Refuges during the Late nineteenth Century", *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 14, June 1987.

contemporary historians who know of the subject to have been essentially rebarbative, and therefore useless as a reforming agent, but no study yet published much space to a consideration of this paradox.

Consideration of these points changed my focus of interest: I decided to present what I could find about the nineteenth-century convent refuges in France, not so as to provide a contrast between a "good" house and a "bad", which was in my mind originally, but so as to show through a wider study what a powerful influence theology has had on how certain aspects of sexuality are seen in France, an influence just lately diminished in this particular case. I no longer sought to distinguish the strands of class, gender and role model within the network of life inside a refuge, for which I would have needed to see all the primary source data available within at least one house. Instead I decided to assemble a crowd of more general testimony and use it to throw light on a picture which historians have never seen. I eventually obtained enough archival material to be able to focus on the fine detail in two areas within this image: the completed picture I believe to be sufficiently informative to be worth the time and trouble it has cost me.

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I have used the metaphor of gleaning in an almost empty field to express my sense of being about a difficult though not totally unrewarding study. Its value to me is better shown by another metaphor. Imagine history as a vast, pictorial mosaic floor, damaged by time and circumstance, with figures representing historians here and there all over it, singly or in groups. They are concerned with restoration, laboriously fitting back into the whole the little coloured pieces collected outside from piles of other damaged fabric. Some of the recovered squares fill out the background of a scene; some are crucial to the reconstruction of a face, a hand, an implement. All are necessary to varying degrees, for as sections are filled in large areas become intelligible and are seen to relate to a coherent whole.

The document that follows represents some of this restoration work, done in the large area called "France". One of the background figures of a group known as "sexually disgraced women" has been partially filled in; it shows her entering a convent refuge, a building of antique shape whose image is full of lacunae, but whose function and personnel is now more clearly defined. The striking group of the prostitute at the crossroads of all anxieties also gains in significance, if it can be seen that a church stands near the crossroads.

The great image of the Church in France is of course constantly being embellished with new material by teams of ecclesiastical historians, but very few of them work on the crossroads side, although it looks as if one of the buildings side chapels must open there. To put it plainly, the underlying argument of this thesis is that in discussing prostitution in the nation formerly known as "the eldest daughter of the Church", it is unhistorical to ignore the theology which has contributed to the people's understanding of reality. The West is till too near the age of faith to have grown up in ignorance of its values and shall probably never do so, for history shows that it is the nature of Christianity to experience passionate revivals. I therefore argue that the toleration and support given to the convent refuges in France in the nineteenth century were the result of an interpretation of the prostitute's essential nature handed down by moral theology. The interest taken by writers and reformers in the problem her presence represented in society was also accompanied (if unconsciously) by prejudices which stemmed from a level in French culture where the Church's estimation of good and evil was still rooted, as yet unreached by either the Enlightenment or the Revolution.

Therefore I believe that the convent refuges were not anachronisms, although in this century, and only since the second World War, they have finally become so. Before that they embodied an extreme expression of Christianity's attitude to life in the world, certainly of Catholic moral theology with regard to sinful women. The Golden Legend tells that Mary Magdalen, after Christ's ascension, spent the rest of her life in penitence and prayer from which only death released. Heaven was her great reward, and only heaven. This is not to be taken lightly. The image was imposed in fact on the

lives of disgraced women in the refuges. Those that I studied were founded by different persons in different circumstances, but their belief system was the same. Despite variations in individual tone, often very clearly expressed, the atmosphere of the convent refuges was one of painful preparation for a holy death. No realistic effort was made to condition the many women and girls who passed through them for re-entry into society at a respectable level. The local bishop's representative was a regular visitor; the local mayor and prefect had the right to inspect - rarely used. It is arguable that no steps were taken by the French Church or state to alter the quality of life within the refuges, even in the nineteenth century, partly because of the unresolved conflict, in society and the Church itself, between the old conviction of the necessity to repress and contain female sexuality and the desire to show mercy to the unfortunate.

The title of the study is more general than I had first intended. On one hand, although in France from the twelfth century the refuge was designed to shelter repentant prostitutes, yet I could barely find concrete proof that those of the nineteenth had ever taken in any of the "lost sisterhood". On the other hand, troublesome, rebellious, or homeless girls, and those imprisoned for "moral vagabondage", were certainly among the refuges' inmates. For this reason my title speaks of sexual disgrace rather than prostitution, although the tone of those contemporary writers who mention the girls at all always implies a shame too great to give a name to, leaving the reader to think the worst of all of them.

Towards the end of my period overseas I had the good fortune to encounter in the outskirts of Bordeaux a *soeur archiviste* and a mother superior generous enough to allow a stranger to examine what were to them sacred documents, the registers for the first forty-one years of their Miséricorde's existence, made when its venerable foundress was still alive.⁹ These books assisted me to present what I believe is a

⁹ In contrast to this was my experience with the retired superioress of the extinct Refuge Sainte Anne outside Paris. Mother St Pierre admitted that she had upstairs several cartons of letters and other documents relevant to the history of the house, but she had been told by the Prior to whom she was subject that "the archives do not exist." In any case she could not allow me to see them, because as at her age she could not decipher the writing, she could not tell whether the documents were suitable to be shown to an outsider or not. Apart from this her reception of me personally was very kind.

credible image of the penitent, the humble base upon which the structure of any refuge rested, for whose betterment the nuns were holy, the walls thick; on whose labour, early and late, depended the ability of the house to feed its inmates, and with whose sufferings Heaven itself was pleased.

That such girls *should* weep for their sins is a conviction derived from the first records of Christianity; therefore the opening chapter of the thesis is an account of the development of the Church's attitude to prostitution and the establishment of the early refuges in France. Chapter II contains evidence both of the lasting effect of this theology on nineteenth-century attitudes to the disgraced female and also of the pressure to understand and to help them.

Chapters III, IV and V concern the refuges actually studied. They describe the renewed activities of two long-established female congregations, and the development of one of them into an international order. Three small, autonomous foundations are also covered here. I did not attempt to give an account of the congregation of Notre Dame du Refuge, the second-largest institute of the two that were and are devoted specifically to work among sexually disgraced women in France. My reasons are, firstly that their constitutions and methods were almost identical with those of the most important order, N.D. du Bon Pasteur d'Angers, which I did describe at length. Secondly I was told by other historians what I found for myself in practice, that the autonomous houses of this congregation are even harder to deal with than those of its nineteenth-century rival, the aforementioned Bon Pasteur. Indeed, with regard to the latter, I found my attempts to communicate completely useless in France, but the mother house of the Australian province was much more welcoming. It made some very interesting, little known secondary source material available to me.

The last three chapters contain first, an account of "the spirituality of the refuge", the way in which the centuries-old moral theology was appreciated and put into practice within the enclosure. A description of the penitents follows, using the registers of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux, together with a suggestion of the way life "inside" might appear to those it was meant to reform. Finally, in Chapter VIII, evidence is produced

of the exploitation of female labour which could so easily be the darker side of refuge life, yet one which, by the power of theology, the exploiters could amply justify to themselves. The material in this chapter is largely data from the departmental archives of Maine et Loire.

Often, while digging for information in France, I saw a promising vein of research disappear into unmineable rocks of obstinacy, even hostility, on the part of archival custodians; often what looked good turned out to be worthless for my purposes, yet I was still able to uncover much that was interesting, informative and new. The evidence that I present is, I believe, firm enough to support what can be called a work of combined theological and social history. It is a consistent account of an institution which in the nineteenth century appeared to be merely a survival from a lost age of faith, and yet whose *raison d'être* was implicitly accepted by society, so much so that it multiplied throughout France and indeed the world, to an extent never seen before. It was a paradoxical creation, to some a work of mercy divinely inspired, and for others a life-denying form of repression to which earning their bread from prostitution was the preferred alternative.

PART ONE: THEOLOGY, THE STATE AND THE FALLEN WOMAN





Chapter I - Theology and the early refuges

From the very beginning of its history the Christian Church in the West has directed its message to mankind universally, aiming to reach the largest number, irrespective of rank and sex. If, used to wealth and power, it has neglected the poor, at times of spiritual revival a renewed appreciation of the character and life of Jesus its founder, born among the poor, has drawn it back repeatedly to its apostolate among the masses and the search for even the scabbiest lost sheep. Despite the counter-current of late antiquity's pessimism regarding the flesh, the very early appearance of its written scriptures required the Church to consider even prostitutes as part of the great body of "the sick" for whom the Lord had come.

While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.* And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'¹

The prostitute is even singled out by Luke,² who reported the classic scene in which a woman, known publicly as a sinner, took her place behind Jesus as he reclined at table and washed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and anointed them with oil. He accepted her worship and absolved her with the words "...her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love." Matthew (Ch.26, vv. 6-13) and Mark (Ch. 14, vv. 3-9) tell of an unnamed woman who poured costly perfumed oil over the Messiah's head, again while he sat at table, in the home of Simon the leper at Bethany. There is no indication that the woman was of bad character; her offering was accepted as an anointing "in preparation of my burial" by Jesus, who was coming to the end of his ministry. A

¹ Matthew Ch. 9, vv. 10-13. The Jerusalem Bible is used here and for subsequent quotations.

² Luke Ch. 7, vv. 36-50.

later gospel, that of St John (Ch.12, vv. 1-8), appears to link the three accounts by describing an incident at the house of Lazarus at Bethany, six days before the Passover at which Jesus died. In this account the woman is named - Mary, sister of Lazarus. She pours costly oil of nard over Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair. As in the similar accounts in Matthew and Mark, Jesus rebuked those who accused the woman of extravagance and accepted her action as appropriate in view of his coming death. There is no mention of sin or forgiveness.

Pope Gregory the Great (590-604³) identified the female sinner with the long hair and Lazarus' sister Mary as the same woman (despite the differences in the scriptural accounts) and this woman was further identified as having been a disciple of Jesus known as Mary of Magdala "from whom seven demons had gone out"⁴. Thus over a period of time the word "Magdalen" became the synonym for a repentant prostitute who had turned to Christ. The Golden Legend has it that the original Magdalen travelled to Marseilles in southern France after the resurrection of Jesus and where she converted many, before retiring to a lonely spot in order to spend the rest of her life in prayer and penance.

In contrast to the radical teaching of Christ, who warned the religious authorities of the day that "tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the Kingdom of God before you",⁵ the early Church had also inherited through the Hebrew scriptures the metaphor of the prostitute as the image of treachery to God:

Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and look! Is there a single place where you have not offered your body? You waited by the roadside for clients like an Arab in the desert. You have polluted the country with your prostitution and your vices.⁶

³ Dates after the name of any pope refer to his pontificate, not to birth and death.

⁴ Luke, Ch.8, v.2.

⁵ Matthew, Ch. 21, v.31.

⁶ Jeremiah, Ch.3 vv. 1-2.

This passage refers to the worship of Baal in Judah and Israel, which entailed the practice of sacred prostitution and infant sacrifice by fire in the god's hilltop shrines. Yet despite the rage within the divine messages, the God of Israel is always ready to pardon. The book of Hosea expresses this most clearly. The prophet believed himself commanded to marry a prostitute, to suffer her eventual betrayal and then to take her back again as his wife - all in order to demonstrate to the Jews the relationship between themselves and the Most High.

This theme is entirely ignored, not to say repudiated, by the writer of Revelations. He destined his material for a minority church persecuted by Rome, which he saw in a vision as Babylon, the great whore clothed in purple and scarlet, sitting on seven hills:

...and she was holding a gold winecup filled with the disgusting filth of her fornication; on her forehead was written a name...'Babylon the Great, the mother of all the prostitutes and all the filthy practices on the earth.' I saw that she was drunk, drunk with the blood of the...martyrs of Jesus.⁷

The image of the whore who fornicated with kings and grew drunk on the blood of the saints was used, centuries later, by Protestants as a symbol of that same church which had survived ancient Rome's persecution and succeeded to her place of honour on the seven hills, an indication of the enduring power of Revelations to appeal to Christians under stress.

A dichotomy exists therefore in the New Testament which was not present in the Old. The Hebrew prophets compared God's people to a harlot, culpable but destined for full rehabilitation. "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow".⁸ The Christian texts contain two contrasting attitudes, that embodied in Christ's treatment of an actual woman, coupled with his habitual acceptance of prostitutes as the equals of other believers, and the hatred of the whore herself expressed in the thrilling

⁷ Revelations, Ch. 17, vv. 4,5.

⁸ Isaiah, Ch.1, v.18.

poetry of two whole chapters of Revelations. The latter, by using the figure of the prostitute to represent an alien, irremediable and unpardonable evil, does not allow the Christian to identify with her in any way.

Although the response of Christians to persecution by the decadent Roman state was only one factor in the development of the Early Church's identification of sexual pleasure with evil, it was reinforced by the action of the Roman authorities, who acknowledged the new religion's preoccupation with moral purity by sending Christian women into the brothels while the men went to the arena. Thus Tertullian was able to make his famous profession of faith:

Magistrates...condemn us...crush us! Your injustice proves our innocence. That is why God lets us suffer it. For latterly in giving up a Christian woman to the procurer rather than to the lions, you have shown that for us the stain upon chastity is reckoned more heinous than any punishment or any death. And nevertheless your cruelties do not profit you...We increase every time that you cut us down. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.⁹

The Influence of Augustine

Whereas in its early stages Christian moral teaching was comparatively unsystematic and unreflective, the entry of educated pagans into the Church brought about the development of that moral theology which Augustine's thought was to dominate both in his lifetime and for centuries thereafter. In the first place he entered fully into the already present preoccupation with sin, and argued powerfully for the doctrine of St Paul, which teaches that Adam's sin was passed on by inheritance to all of his race without exception. It was a distortion of the order of being between man and God for which Adam and mankind were justly punished, and this justice was as pure when it condemned an unbaptised baby to hell as it was when sending a hardened sinner there, for in both cases the soul in question was already lost:

⁹ Tertullian, *Apologetics*, 50.

The melancholy consequence of that original sin is that human nature is vitiated, and lust and ignorance are its lot, to such an extent that it lacks even the ability to appreciate the full seriousness of that first wicked act of disobedience which resulted in the whole human race, which had its roots poisoned in Adam, being a 'massa damnata'.¹⁰

Despite an inherited condition which relentlessly inclines all to evil, Augustine also taught that when a person responds to the call of the holy spirit, the grace of Christ heals the effects of original sin and personal sin. The soul thereafter is not only whole but at last genuinely free, and the human nature becomes henceforward divinised. Natural virtue is useless to procure this state: only grace will provide it. A relapse into sin or unbelief is a perversion of the freedom of the Christian, and entirely the fault of the person involved. Augustine also recognised that God may choose to whom He will offer this priceless gift, therefore it may happen that some never receive it, through no apparent fault of their own. Belief in divine justice is therefore an act of faith, not of reason. His theological position in this regard was confirmed by the Council of Ephesus (431) and the Second Council of Orange (529).

Faced with a divided Church after the Reformation, Catholic theologians re-emphasized the primacy of Augustine as a teacher of morals by enshrining his thought in its decree on justification. The result of relying so heavily on one interpretation of the power of grace was, or perhaps one should say is, that a Christian sinner is left without any excuse for his or her moral weakness, whether he or she plead personal or social deficiencies.¹¹ This view of reality has proved itself hostile to attempts to find social justice through political means, and understandably so, for it locates the solution to the problem of evil in the individual will, which only needs to act in submission to the teaching of the Church for it to be healed and cleansed, and society with it in

¹⁰ John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: a study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 46, translating from *De civ. Dei*, 21, 12.

¹¹ It has been applied to justify the prohibition of contraceptives within marriage by papal encyclicals of Pius XI (1930) and Paul VI (1968).

consequence. As Mahoney says, to hold another view would be tantamount to admitting that in some circumstances God (who only speaks through the Church and the scriptures) compels man to sin by demanding of him what he is unable to do, and thereby acts unjustly, which is a blasphemous proposition.

St Augustine's second and equally powerful legacy to the Western Church is his teaching regarding sexuality. His pride in his own reason and will had been constantly humiliated before his conversion by what was apparently a very strong sexual drive. The dissipation into which it led him convinced the future Father of the Church of the truth of St Paul's teaching that there is a law of sin in the very members of a man's own body which wars against the spirit and its desire for God. Woman is the creature whose physical presence arouses lust in a man even against his will; as Eve she represents the corporeal side of man, taken from him in the beginning to be his helpmeet in the work of procreation, but not necessary in any other way. For other functions, particularly those of a spiritual nature, another male is more suitable. The identification of woman with the flesh and the flesh with sexual temptation made her a living image of the corrupt and ephemeral world of matter which the antique civilisations of the West had come to distrust. The Christian Church did not invent the rejection of the body which it found so well supported in the writings of Paul, but it did incorporate it into its moral teachings. Augustine and Jerome, although opposed by the Fathers of the Greek Church, laid a foundation for a rejection of sexuality and a distrust of marriage which have influenced the lives of millions in the West.¹² Thus to Augustine even the marriage of Christian partners, in which sexual union is used only for procreation, cannot compare with virgin chastity maintained deliberately in

¹² Before the Second Vatican Council one of the most widely used texts on moral theology was the *Theologia moralis summa*, by P.M. Zalba, Biblioteca de autores cristianos, Madrid, 1957. Zalba considered lust to be always both gravely sinful and intrinsically so and defined it as "any inordinate use of the powers of generation". Today, although the Roman magisterium still teaches that contraceptive intercourse, fornication, adultery and sodomy are mortal sins, in the same class as infanticide, euthanasia, suicide and genocide, a great many Roman Catholic moral theologians now dissent from the opinion of authority in questions involving sexuality, self-destruction, and abortion. See *Principles of Catholic Moral Life*, ed. William E. May, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1981.

imitation of Christ. Heaven, he believed, reserved its highest rewards for virgins of both sexes.

Let marriages possess their own good...All these however are offices of human duty: but virginal chastity and freedom through pious continence from all sexual intercourse is the portion of Angels and a practice, in corruptible flesh, of perpetual incorruption. To this let all fruitfulness yield, all chastity of married life; ...heaven hath not chastity of married life. Assuredly they will have something great beyond others in that common immortality who have something already not of the flesh, in the flesh.¹³

Also in the fourth century the Greek Father, St John Chrysostom, concerned to prevent the men of his flock from contamination by the popular pagan relaxation of going to the brothel, was one of the first Christian preachers to associate sexual desire with filth, in his Fifth Homily on I Thessalonians:

Impurity is a pernicious evil for all: the swine covered with dirt spreads infection all along its path. One sees only, smells only the stink of the dungheap. It is the very image of fornication.

This metaphor reflects a poor light upon marriage when the latter is recommended, as it was by Chrysostom, as a means of containing male desire within morally acceptable bounds. Augustine had already considered the problem of controlling male desire. His most memorable statement regarding it comes from *De Ordine*, a philosophical dialogue written six months before his baptism in 386 a.d., in which he attempted to prove that Divine Providence holds even the harlot within a beneficial order:

Is there anything more sordid, more miserable, more shameful and dishonouring than the condition of prostitutes, procurers and other evils of the same kind? Expel the courtesans however, and passion will overturn the world. Put them in the position of married women, you will sow infamy and dishonour. Thus such

¹³ Of Holy Virginitly, from *Seventeen Short Treatises of St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, translated by members of the Anglican Church, Oxford, John Henry Parker and F. & J. Rivington, London, 1847, p.315.

people have, with regard to morals, a totally impure life, but the laws of order assign them a place, albeit the most vile.¹⁴

Therefore Augustine did not preach that brothels should be suppressed, for they were a necessary part of the *saeculum*, which may be roughly translated as "the world", and meant by him to represent "the sum total of human existence as we experience it in the present, as we know it has been since the fall of Adam, and as we know it will continue until the Last Judgment", after which it will be totally destroyed.¹⁵ Yet, true to the earliest Christian tradition, Augustine was able to regard the *soul* of the prostitute as being as valuable as any other, and she too might enter the "City of God" on earth by receiving, through God's mercy, grace to lead a totally reformed life. What we have in his teaching then is an affirmation of Christ's mercy to the prostitute, coupled with a firm rejection of any moral worth in her trade, notwithstanding its usefulness in "the world". The fact that God will give grace to the repentant whore is also linked closely with the idea that the reform it will effect will lead her out of the world forever, like the Magdalen, in order to follow Christ. It must also be emphasised that, until very recently, when the Church ever spoke of mercy it was speaking not of good to the physical or social being of the sinner on earth, but offering survival in a supernatural realm, glorious existence, a union with the divine that was totally unmerited. In its own terms it was offering far more than merely health and happiness in the present lifetime.

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Accounts of the first four centuries of Christianity show frequent reference to the conversion of prostitutes undertaken by monks, who persuaded the women to enter convents or hermitages, for a new and powerful teaching of the early Church, particularly commended by St Jerome, allowed women to redeem their essentially

¹⁴ Augustine, *De Ordine*, II, IV, 12.

¹⁵ Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine*, New York, 1972, p.37.

carnal nature by the practice of chastity and the avoidance of marriage in favour of the monastic life. The virtue of chastity was associated by the Fathers with great spiritual powers, in fact it was the prerequisite for attaining them. By this means women, even the most degraded, were encouraged to believe that they might attain to spiritual heights never offered them by the religions of antiquity: communion with the divine, spiritual nature of God himself. As well as St Mary Magdalen, two former prostitutes were credited with the attainment of sanctity by the early Church, St. Pelagia and St. Mary the Egyptian. The first had lived a dissolute life as an actress until her conversion. Afterwards, disguised as a man, she devoted herself to penances in the Garden of Olives in Jerusalem, where she stayed until her death in 457. St Mary had seventeen years' experience as a prostitute before her conversion in 373. For the rest of her life she lived as a desert hermit, enduring a long period of intense psychological stress before finding peace in old age.

By the sixth century, through the use of the sacrament of confession, the Church in Western Europe claimed an empire over all sexual practices, licit or illicit, and the right to interrogate the faithful on their most intimate actions, as well as their thoughts while performing them. Sins against nature, sodomy, bestiality and the avoidance of conception, were graver offences than having intercourse with a whore, which was classed as only simple fornication.¹⁶ The Church also imposed sanctions against marital intercourse on Fridays and also during Lent, Holy Week, before Christmas and on the eve of notable feast days, in order that the tainted pleasures of love might be prohibited in honour of the holy season, it being axiomatic then and until very recent times that spiritual life must flourish at the expense of the flesh rather than in harmony with it. "We do not claim that marriage is shameful", wrote Pope Gregory the Great, "but...this licit conjugal union cannot take place without fleshly delight...this voluptuous pleasure...cannot in any manner be held to be guiltless."¹⁷ In his book on

¹⁶ See the table of the sins of lust in the Appendix I.

¹⁷ J.-L. Flandrin, *Un temps pour embrasser*; Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1983, p.126.

the origins of Western sexual morality Jean-Louis Flandrin concludes that the monastic orders which became the driving force and the executors of the Church's missionary endeavour in Europe between the sixth and the eleventh centuries, ended by making the sexual discipline of obedient Christian couples almost as severe as that practised in monasteries. Nevertheless it became evident that however intimately the Church was linked with the power of the state it would never be possible to enforce the rule of chastity on males in civil life, and so a toleration of prostitution as a prop of public order that had been sanctioned by St Augustine, continued to exist side by side with the rigid moral condemnation of all sexual intercourse outside marriage.

This ambiguity was given practical expression by the canonists, the lawyers of the medieval church. James Brundage indicates their importance to historians by pointing out that, since the Church was the largest and most intricate institutional structure in society at the time, its legal system was immensely influential in determining the attitudes and policy of medieval people at every level. The ranks of the canonists included some of the ablest and most powerful minds of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, whose insights and ideas, although embedded in lengthy and often tortuous legal treatises, "had far greater impact on the functioning of governments, the enforcement of social policy, and the workings of business than the ideas of any comparable group of writers."¹⁸ On the whole they supported the Church's distrust of sexuality, even in marriage. Their founding father, the monk Gratian, accepted St Jerome's definition of a prostitute, that "A whore is one who is available for the lust of many men", thereby placing promiscuity rather than an act of sale as the determining factor in deciding whether a woman was a harlot or not, a decision which reinforced the tendency in European society to equate sexual pleasure with sin. In the article just cited and in his most recent work, Brundage found more evidence of the weight of St Augustine's pronouncement in *De ordine*, considering it probable that the attitude

¹⁸ James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law", *Signs*, Summer 1976, Vol. 1, No.4., p.826.

expressed therein is the wellspring of later medieval and even modern thought regarding prostitution.¹⁹ Another influential pronouncement in canon law regards possible circumstances mitigating the harlot's guilt for carrying on her trade. It was accepted that poverty was one of the root causes of prostitution, but the canonists decreed that however hungry or desperate the woman might be, she was not justified in turning to prostitution in order to relieve her need.²⁰ Therefore the prostitute was always in a state of mortal sin as long as she continued to work, always certain to go straight to hell should she die too suddenly to be able to find a priest willing to hear her last confession and give her absolution.²¹ Even should her end take place with the advantage of the Church's intervention of her behalf, the fact of having continued in a state of mortal sin up to the last illness was bound to entail a very long expiatory period in Purgatory for the unhappy soul. The danger that the prostitute ran of undergoing one or other of these misfortunes was, of course, a justification for the canonists' severity with regard to her: to the Church, it would be a distortion of true mercy to find excuses for actions which led to spiritual suicide.

Further justification of the canonical position was furnished by the arguments of St Thomas Aquinas (1224-74), who permitted the Church to accept alms from a prostitute on the principle that although to practise prostitution was shameful and opposed to God's law, the profits made were not illegal and thus might be kept by the woman.²² However, if she used some of them for almsgiving, such profits might not be offered publicly to the Church because of the scandal it would cause.²³ He also settled the question of whether she must pay tithes by deciding that she could not be dispensed from payment, but that the Church might not accept the money until she had

¹⁹ Brundage, p. 830 and p. 106 of *Law, Sex and Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago, 1987.

²⁰ Brundage, "Prostitution in the Med.Can.Law", p.836.

²¹ A sin deemed mortal is one that is deliberately committed and of so grave a nature that it immediately deprives the sinner of the grace of God received at baptism. If not cancelled by the sacrament of absolution it will eventually be punished by damnation.

²² Aquinas, S.T., II, II, 62, 5.

²³ *Summa*, II, ii, 86, 3.

reformed.²⁴ Apart from this the *Summa Theologica* barely mentions the prostitute; it certainly does not characterize her as especially vile. Yet the medieval church became increasingly hostile to her and sanctioned those rulings of the state by which she was forced to dress differently from other women or was made the victim of public disgrace or torture, without having committed either crime or heresy. Thus as far as public life was concerned, the merciful view of the public woman given in the gospels, which implies that she is simply a part of sinful mankind, was eventually made secondary to the hostility found in the last book of the New Testament, in which she is presented as the type of irremediable sin. This image did not cancel out that of the Magdalen, who offered to the Saviour a costly and beautiful gift symbolising the penitence to which, according to legend, she dedicated the rest of her life. Dispersed throughout the *Summa* is the Thomian doctrine of grace, which teaches that as God has provided everything necessary for the continuance of the natural world, so He provides through grace everything necessary for the supernatural life of the spirit. Once given, therefore, this grace will be enough; it is a never-ending source of strength for the Christian soul, and the prostitute may be assured that she will receive it if she accepts the divine offer by an act of her free will. The reverse of this is, of course, that if she subsequently returns to her old life, she is wholly to blame for her relapse and has shown herself unworthy of divine mercy..

In the sixteenth century the impulse to reform given the Catholic Church by the Council of Trent (1543-1564) included the renewed desire to lead even prostitutes back into the fold, yet what might be called the age of comparative tolerance in Europe with regard to her public presence was over. Henceforward it was seen as a problem, or a symptom of social degeneration. Historians have found several reasons to explain this phenomenon: the spread of syphilis, the increase in religious faith, a higher estimation of marriage, the wish to control the activities of young men, the influence of educated

²⁴ *Summa*, II, ii, 87, a2. ad.2.

European élites directed against the popular confusion of the sacred with the profane.²⁵ Throughout the continent both catholic and protestant authorities closed brothels and increased penalties for prostitution. The reproach of transmitting syphilis, which was to become central to the hostility towards prostitutes in the nineteenth century, when the malady was better understood, was not the major cause of offence to the public before that time, but it strengthened the habit of identifying lust with filth and heaped even more opprobrium on the head of the female partner in casual sexual transactions. In an article on prostitution during the Reformation in Augsburg, Lyndal Roper quotes Luther, denouncing a group of prostitutes to his students:

...the evil spirit sent these whores here...dreadful shabby stinking, loathsome and syphilitic....such a syphilitic whore can give her disease to ten, twenty, thirty and more good people and so she is to be accounted a murderer....If I were a judge I would have such venomous syphilitic whores broken on the wheel and flayed...²⁶

However, measures to abolish prostitution could not be imposed by the authorities, Luther decided, until the gospel was more firmly rooted in men's hearts.

In the eighteenth century the celebrated Carmelite University of Salamanca produced its own guide for the clergy, the *Cursus Theologiae Moralis*. The sixth and ninth commandments are examined in Tome IV, Treatise XXVI, published in 1722. It contains the question "whether it is licit for Christian princes to permit public prostitution". Against tolerance the author presents arguments which suggest that prostitution excites debauchery rather than contains it. On the other hand the argument that justifies tolerance has its source in the combined authority of Saints Augustine and Thomas; its validity is demonstrated by the existence of brothels in Rome itself, a city

²⁵ This is the theme of Lyndal Roper's article, "Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg", *History Workshop*, Issue 19, Spring 1985. See also Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled, Family Life in Reformation Europe*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, and Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne (XVe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Flammarion, Paris, 1978.

²⁶ Luther: *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. G. Tappert, Vol. VIII, London, 1955, pp.292-4.

which was under the rule of the Pontifical Court, which must know best. The author of the treatise concludes therefore that the necessity of avoiding great disorders permits the existence of public prostitution, which is thus tolerated but not approved, being a state of affairs permitted as a concession to the corruption of the times.²⁷

It is now necessary to come closer to home, as it were, and look at the climate of moral theology in France. Ralph Gibson has found that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Church presented to the nation under its instruction a model of catholicism derived from the tridentine reforms, "obsessed with morality, sexually repressive and aiming to traumatise the masses into accepting it by the threat of damnation."²⁸ This "version" of the faith, as Gibson calls it, was capable of being used, and was used, by the committed to enrich their spiritual lives, but was more a religion of fear than of love, especially to those who failed to meet its severe demands. The spiritual élite, particularly those who were educated, as J. McManners holds,²⁹ could perceive the predominance of the love of God in Christian doctrine, and may perhaps have ignored the "*pastorale de la peur*". Gibson does not accept this, considering that there is ample evidence to support the view that all classes took the idea of a severe and vengeful God very seriously, but he notes that, according to Jean Delumeau, there are signs of the beginning of what has been called the dechristianisation of France in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Delumeau judged this early phenomenon not so much as a refusal of the faith itself, but as a rejection of a particular model of catholicism, one which rested on a fundamental pessimism coupled with unshakeable certainty, a religion full of the fear of sin and of hell, its consequence, and which continued the Augustinian rejection of "the world" as wholly incompatible with salvation.³⁰

²⁷ Chauvin, *L'Eglise et Prostitution*, typed thesis for the University of Strasbourg,.....

²⁸ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism - 1789 - 1914*, London & New York, 1989, p.28.

²⁹ J. McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, Oxford, 1981, Chs. 5 and 6.

³⁰ Gibson, p.26.

What may have resulted eventually in a peaceful evolution of religious faith was overtaken by the Revolution of 1789, in the course of which overt hostility to catholicism resulted in massive damage to the structure of the French Church and the end of the acceptance of the practice of religion as an essential part of national life. The constitutional clergy, who had sworn allegiance to the Republic, were regarded by most of the devout as traitors and in any case did not have enough time to reform the traditional model of catholicism before they were swept away by the Restoration. The revived French Church under the Bourbons, being dominated by those who had been "refractory" to the revolutionary state, began once again to present the severe doctrines of catholicism taught under the *ancien régime* as the only form of religious truth. However, new movements within catholicism arose, emphasising the love of God, particularly as expressed through the figure of Mary. Sermons on the small number of the elect, a favourite subject in the preceding two centuries, eventually ceased to be heard as the revived Church strove to convert millions of French men and women ignorant or contemptuous of its doctrine. The idea of the great solemnity of the eucharist, which one might take only rarely, after a very careful confession, was passed over in favour of a positive devotion to the sacrament embodying the living presence of Christ, and which therefore, when reserved in the tabernacle on the altar, as it increasingly was, might be visited and prayed to by all and sundry.

This practice, together with the habit of frequent communion, had been recommended by Alphonsus dei Liguori, whose book *Visits to the Holy Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin for Every Day* (1745), was republished 109 times in France between 1815 and 1908. Liguori was a confessor all his life, and he also advocated that the sinner be received as an erring child, rather than as a criminal. He claimed that, in the long run, he had never refused absolution to anyone. By the 1820's, when the Jesuits began to promote Liguorian moral theology in France,³¹ catholicism in that

³¹ Liguori championed "probabilism", a doctrine which essentially allows the confessor some flexibility in his interpretation of particular moral laws.

country was already undergoing an internal change, by the means of which none of its doctrines was discredited, but a different emphasis was beginning to be placed on certain of them, which they had not been given under the *ancien régime*. Contempt for the flesh and the teaching that eternal damnation is the reward of those who die guilty of even one mortal sin was not abandoned, but gradually became overshadowed by the idea of the mercy of God, who actively sought out the lost sheep, and carried it tenderly into the fold of the Church.

It must be emphasized however that this great patience with sinners was used with regard to their eternal destiny, and therefore was not concerned with their material and social problems in the world except in so far as these interfered or cooperated with the divine will. As Pius IX showed in 1864 by publishing the Syllabus of Errors, and again in 1870 when he published the dogma of papal infallibility, the Catholic Church remained as convinced of the innate depravity of the secular world and correspondingly of its own righteousness, as it had ever been, and ultimately it controlled religious doctrine in France. It was by its authority that the teachings of Liguori were imposed on the whole Church, and that he was subsequently canonised in 1839.³² Possibly because the Church needed to present a more attractive faith to a population no longer required by law to attend its ceremonies, his views were received in France more readily than in any other Catholic country in Europe in the nineteenth century. Considering the Virgin to be co-redemptrix with Christ in the salvation of mankind, Liguori's writings encouraged popular piety, even superstition, which gave her honour. His theology laid the foundation for the announcement of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. Its significance in the context of this chapter is paradoxical: in his advocacy of common sense and mercy in the practice of the confessional, he added his great authority to the teaching of Thomas Sanchez, the fifteenth century Jesuit theologian, who had dared to say that sexual pleasure in

³² The reigning pope was Gregory XVI, who had crushed the beginnings of the liberal catholic revival in France by his condemnation of Lamennais and his disciples.

marriage was not to be condemned. With regard to prostitution however, after weighing up the pronouncements of various theologians of renown, Liguori came to the same conclusion as the Master of Salamanca, judging that it should probably not be tolerated, because men addicted to sexual pleasure become worse if they have access to brothels. Also, as prostitution entails the degradation of many young girls and encourages a contempt for marriage, it should not be acceptable within a Christian state.³³ Nevertheless, possibly basing his final opinion on the experiences of a fellow Redemptorist in Naples, who had battled vainly against the existence of brothels in the city, Liguori had concluded by permitting a tolerance of organized prostitution in large cities, with the proviso that the Church and the state should provide asylum for repentant disgraced women, and children in moral danger.³⁴

It appears that nineteenth century French Catholics were more interested in his exaltation of supernatural womanhood, embodied in the worship of Mary, than they were in his rehabilitation of marital caresses. The weight of Tridentine teaching that concupiscence is at the root of man's sinful nature was not diminished, in fact the increased emphasis given in the nineteenth century to the "spotlessness" of Mary, even from the moment of her conception, indicated that the Church was as hostile to sexuality as it had ever been. Father Felix, a Jesuit, preaching on *Volupté* before a distinguished audience in the first half of the nineteenth century, said:

Among the human passions there is one which, more than others, compromises man's salvation on this earth, one which makes the earth most wretched and which is the most effective in populating hell; this passion which is the most damning has a name which bears witness to our mutual modesty, gentlemen, it is called "the shameful passion".³⁵

³³ *Theologica Moralis*, Vol. III, tr.IV, no. 434.

³⁴ Chauvin, *Eglise et Prostitution*, p.121.

³⁵ *Choix de la Prédication Contemporaine*, Vol.2, 1869, p.531.

Therefore the immediate effect of Liguori's theology was the reinforcement of the (by then) age-old theme of the moral supremacy of the virginal over the sexually experienced life. Another example of this is given in a sermon forming part of the famous *Conferences* preached by Henri Lacordaire during Lent at Notre Dame de Paris over a decade in the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁶ He had been converted in his young manhood and became part of the avant garde of liberal catholicism. After its condemnation he devoted himself to Rome and the 'ultramontane' section of the French Church, devoting himself to the revival of the Dominican order in France. In one of his sermons (particularly aimed at young men) he called chastity "the blessed torture" (*l'heureux supplice*) and claimed that it alone could preserve the tenderness of the heart and the strength of the body in a man. It was the glory of the young, he said. Another preacher, speaking probably to priests or seminarists later in the century, called it:

...the virtue which elevates mankind, which transforms his nature...by making it shine with an immortal radiance. From the brow of one who possesses it stream rays of majestic, heavenly light. [On the other hand, he proclaimed] Do you want to know the greatest scourge of mankind? It is the vice opposed to chastity...Yes my brothers,...we may run through the vast field of human calamities...and show...that all or nearly all originated in the neglect of chastity.³⁷

But repression of sexuality was not the only feature of the renewed devotion to Mary which occurred in religious life in nineteenth-century France. She has always stood for the triumph of mercy over justice within Catholicism, and the Liguorian emphasis accompanied an expansion of that part of the ministry of the Church which was aimed at service to the most helpless among the poor: the orphan, the disabled, the destitute sick, the prisoner, the disgraced and outcast girl.

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³⁶ Lacordaire gave these courses of sermons in 1835, 1836, 1843, 1844 1845, 1846, 1849, 1850 and 1851. He gave others at different times in provincial cities.

³⁷ *Choix de la Prédication*, Vol. 2, p.531.

The beginnings of the refuge in Western Europe³⁸

In the period 1000-1140 Brundage found that the canonists reflected a revival of the Christian tradition of mercy towards the meretrix, rather than her condemnation. "Late twelfth-century popes...did not attempt to repress prostitution (which they had apparently concluded was a hopeless task), but rather aimed to make it easier for women to leave the trade, either through marriage or entrance into religion. In consequence religious houses and even whole orders dedicated to the reform of prostitutes thrived during these decades."³⁹

Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), whose reign was the high point of papal authority, also commended the practice:

It is of all works of charity the most great to tear public women from the clutches of the brothels and to urge them to marry; those who do so obtain pardon from their sins.⁴⁰

Although the encouragement to marry seems unusually generous, it also reflects the poor view of marriage held by the Church before the Council of Trent.

The first French convent refuge was founded for the reception of repentant prostitutes and reformed libertines in 1198, by Foulques de Neuilly, a celebrated evangelist who later preached the fourth crusade. Called the convent of St Antoine des Champs, it was situated just outside Paris.⁴¹ The experiment of trying to reform both sexes did not succeed however; the establishment soon degenerated to the point where the men had to be sent away and the next superior, Pierre de Roissy, imposed the Cistercian rule on the inmates, setting a precedent which was followed by later foundations. When the Convent of St Antoine fell into disuse the Bishop of Paris,

³⁸ The earliest attempt to create a specific institution for the reform of prostitutes was made by the Empress Theodora, in the sixth century.

³⁹ Brundage, *Law, Sex and Society*, p.342.

⁴⁰ Chauvin, p.70., quoting from *Patrologie Latine*, 214, col.102.

⁴¹ The French preacher Robert d'Arbrissel (c. 1045-1116) invited his female penitents of all classes to join his itinerant band of followers. Jacques Dalarun's researches show, however, that he did not thereafter create a separate section for repentant prostitutes in his subsequent foundation at Fontevault. See his article "Robert d'Arbrissel et les femmes" in *Annales*, 1984, no.6.

William III, decided to replace it with a new foundation, the House of the Daughters of God (1226)⁴². In 1254 Saint Louis (Louis IX) dowered this house with an annual rent of 400 livres, on condition that it would maintain 200 converted women whom he caused to be placed there, "unfortunates, who by their vices being absolutely separated from their earthly relations, had no family but in heaven."⁴³ This states quite clearly by implication that there was no place for a repentant prostitute in normal life; she must fix any hope she had on the next world alone. The king had made laws to establish justice and control vice in France, which he wished to see resemble as far as possible the image of the Kingdom of God on earth. His severity had caused prostitutes and brothel owners to be driven out of city and village, leaving hundreds homeless and destitute. Afterwards he found, like so many others before and since, that the demand for sexual services outside the moral law was going to be met in any case, and so decided to allow the girls to be re-established in special districts outside towns and cities.

Another early attempt of this kind in France was made by St Dominic, who in 1215 founded a short-lived cloistered community at Toulouse, called the order of St Mary Magdalen, made for the preservation and reform of sexually disgraced girls. Its sisters were robed in white, like the Dominican monks. After its failure the order was revived in the Rhineland by Rudolph of Worms. Gregory IX granted it papal approval in the same year as he issued the following bull with regard to a similar enterprise:

Agnani, 8 June 1227 Gregory IX R. congratulates the canon of St Maurice of Hildesheim that certain most miserable women who had fallen in the mud and filth of violent desire have been turned away from the pit of misery and thus it has been brought about that many have become married and others saved from whoredom and from prostitutes made into nuns.⁴⁴

⁴² Parent du Châtelet, *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, Vol II, p.359.

⁴³ P. Pansier, *l'oeuvre des repenties à Avignon*, Champion, Paris, 1910, p.11.

⁴⁴ Pansier, *L'Oeuvre des Repenties*, p.12. The order was placed under the direction of the Dominicans in 1286, and became independent of it them in 1291. After 1370 it declined. Small communities of Magdalens developed individually: Marseilles, 1272; Naples 1324; Paris 1592; Seville 1550. The sisters were known popularly as the White Ladies, because of the colour of their habits.

This seems to suggest that the women who had married had perhaps not been saved from actual whoredom, and that those who had come from brothels had been "made into nuns" rather than wives. The identification of sexual desire with mud or excrement had by this date the tradition of centuries behind it, and the whore's many sexual partners must have made her a lot dirtier, spiritually, than a woman who had only fallen into the arms of one lover, although the dirt itself was uniformly black.

Post medieval accounts of prostitution in provincial cities or in the capital in pre-revolutionary France usually mention briefly that a refuge or convent for penitent females existed somewhere in the area. Thus Jacques Rossiaud, in his excellent description of the system of rape and humiliation used to drive isolated women into the brothels of South-Eastern France during the last half of the fifteenth century, refers to charitable foundations, of which there were not many, which took in only an élite based on poverty and repentance - and youth.⁴⁵ The refuges did not wish to become almshouses for ageing women who could not make a living. Rossiaud also found that the provincial towns which he studied had charitable bodies which sometimes offered dowries to harlots over thirty years old, so that they might marry. Although he did not find this generosity extended to all "old girls", he takes comfort in the idea that "The hell of the prostitutes was only a purgatory which lasted as long as their youth." Society was ready to redeem them later, having made use of their bodies to control the sexual aggression and potentially criminal behaviour of the local young men.

Rossiaud approached the phenomena described in his study from the structuralist point of view: society uses certain procedures which may be unjust to the individual but which keep the social machine from breaking down, and therefore these procedures are ultimately beneficial in that social stability is preserved. Catholic theology would oppose this by postulating that the social machine is already irreparably damaged and without divine grace cannot hope to run well, or even to run

⁴⁵ Jacques Rossiaud, "Prostitution, jeunesse et sexualité dans les villes de la France du sud-est au 15e siècle", *Annales*, Year 31, no.2, 1976, p.21.

for long. Yet, in a sense, Augustine and the structuralists are not really at opposing ideological poles: they stand back to back on this issue. For after saying that Divine Providence ultimately orders all things well, an essential plank beneath the position which affirms the benevolence of God, Augustine justified it by arguing as if the maintenance of the social order and its general well-being were a goal aimed at by the Almighty. Thus both Rossiaud and the Latin Father can accept the degradation of a certain number of women to the end that dangerous male aggression may be contained.

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Whereas Ralph Gibson concentrates on the "*théologie féroce*" of tridentine catholicism in France, Henri Bremond takes a more positive view. The reforms effected by the Council of Trent, he wrote, gave force and authority to the efforts of thousands of Christians, both clergy and lay, who had previously "lain groaning in the darkness, praying for reform with all their strength."⁴⁶ In public and private they began to evangelise the land, reaching all classes of society. It was they who created the spiritual environment in which the numerous works of public charity founded by St Vincent de Paul in the next century could flourish. The emphasis was not by any means on the attainment of social justice, but on individual salvation, followed by the attempt to achieve sanctity. According to Bremond the first half of the seventeenth century in France thus had a unique quality: the trend towards a mystical, very inward-looking piety engendered by the experience of civil war and hard times was continued, but with the difference that those who generated religious feeling in others by means of their knowledge of mystical states within the cloister or the devout family, now began to radiate activity as well as holiness:

⁴⁶ Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Bloud et Gay, Paris, 1921, Vol.II, p.2.

One sees them suddenly burst from the obscurity which normally conceals them and impose themselves upon the attention of the crowd, coming to the front of the stage, taking on a heroic image, forming groups, giving the public lessons in sanctity, creating charitable works which prolong their own influence, bringing their weight to bear on the political machine.⁴⁷

At the heart of the Catholic reform and Counter-Reformation movements lay a fervent philanthropic initiative, whose leading spirits desired not only to help the poor and distressed but to restore to the Church her lost integrity and humility. An early expression of this was the bull *Salvator noster*, published by Leo X in 1520, on the occasion of the opening of a house dedicated to St Mary Magdalen for the reception of women wishing to leave "a sordid life full of stinking pleasures" and become nuns. This event, according to Sherrill Cohen, marked the official beginning of the revival of the old drive to convert harlots and was the precursor of "an explosion of institutional asylums" for former prostitutes (known as *convertite*) and also for women who had abandoned their marriages, or been driven out of their homes. In Italy the movement was led by the Jesuits and other male orders as part of a great campaign to help the poor. In 1542 St Ignatius himself founded one such institution, the House of St Martha, in Rome. This movement Cohen notes, was also carried on in France.⁴⁸ There as elsewhere, in response to the austerity of the protestant reformers, the currents of the counter-reformation also tried to sweep away concubinage, especially for priests, and with it prostitution and its hangers-on. The movement was welcomed by civic authorities in France because the tendency was (then as later) to attribute social troubles and economic disasters to the corruption of morals, particularly to sexual licence.

It is interesting to remember in this context that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also the age of what Hugh Trevor-Roper has called "the European

⁴⁷ H. Bremond, p.4.

⁴⁸ Sherrill Cohen, in "Asylums for Women in Counter-Reformation Italy", from *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe*, Ed. Sherrin Marshall, Indiana University Press, 1989, p. 168.

witch-craze",⁴⁹ a form of madness to which even the learned and devout were not immune. Jean Bodin, the French political philosopher and lawyer who had damaged his own career by defending freedom of conscience and the people's right to land, yet believed and argued that heaven and earth were sustained by angelic spirits who had counterparts in the demonic hierarchy. Therefore witchcraft was a real force within the state, which must be opposed by the king with severity.⁵⁰ Although it has been argued that the witch-craze has its roots in sexuality, as is suggested by its use of obscene tortures and the choice of women as the target for a male-dominated system of persecution, the prostitute was only incidentally caught up in its operations: she was not sought out. Norman Cohn, in *Europe's Inner Demons*, suggests that this evil phenomenon was a symptom of the wholesale sexual frustration engendered by Christianity itself, as it had been interpreted by the celibate priesthood of Europe.⁵¹ If so, it might explain why the prostitute's life, although bound up in sex, did not inspire such murderous hostility, because she was so completely at the service of men.

Yet Christianity is, in its own terms, predominantly a religion of love and mercy. Bound as they were to believe most of humanity standing on the brink of well-merited damnation, many Catholics responded to this thought with ardent pity. During this period in France, alongside the current of fear and hate which destroyed so many lives, was the stream of Christian charity which flowed from the work of St Vincent de Paul, the founder of the congregation of the Sisters of Charity. Under his influence, emanating as it did from the circle of society closest to the throne, many aristocratic women became involved in the care of the sick and destitute. It became acceptable, even fashionable, to found or patronise the works of mercy of which the period had so much need. In Paris, over the years, a network of houses for sexually disgraced and penitent women gradually came into existence, all under the authority of the

⁴⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch Craze*

⁵⁰ Jean Bodin, *La démonomanie des sorciers*, 1580.

⁵¹ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: an enquiry inspired by the great witch-hunt*, Chatto/Heinemann, London, 1975.

Archbishop.⁵² Of these the House of the Good Shepherd (*La Maison du Bon Pasteur*), founded 1686, served as model for various other foundations with similar aims in provincial France notably at Orleans, Angers, Bordeaux, Troyes, Toulouse and Amiens. These houses were all run by lay sisters. During the same period a similarly fruitful foundation was made, but with greater difficulty, for the care of repentant prostitutes by nuns. The two foundations were the most influential in France within their particular field and survived into the nineteenth century, where one of them, after modifying its statutes, succeeded in making its name part of the French language as a synonym for "refuge".

St John Eudes' Daughters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge

At the time when St Vincent de Paul was establishing his great active female order, the Sisters of Charity, John Eudes, a renowned Norman missionary, was attempting to reform the Church from within by retraining the clergy. Almost by chance he allowed himself to be persuaded by a poor woman of his acquaintance to found a marginal work, a small house for the reception of repentant prostitutes in Caen in 1641. This house, like that of Saint Ignatius a century earlier, aroused hostility and scorn among the laity, misapprehension and distrust within the Church because, in the words of Eduard Bruley, a twentieth century writer, "Rome always fears that in putting holy young women and female sinners together, the first will be perverted without the amendment of the second."⁵³ Rome also had not made up its mind about the correctness of allowing nuns to break their strict cloister at that time (in order to enter the living quarters of their penitents), and so Eudes could not obtain papal approval for his foundation until 1666. By then it had been necessary to found a new

⁵² From the "Avertissement" of the *Relation abrégée de la vie de Madame de Combé Institutrice de la Maison du Bon Pasteur, avec les règlements de la Communauté*, chez Florentin et Pierre Delaulne, Paris, 1700. Bordeaux was not mentioned, but a house was opened there.

⁵³ Eduard Bruley, *Le Bon Pasteur d'Angers*, Editions Spes, Paris 1931, p.20.

order to run it, owing to the difficulty of obtaining religious sisters from other congregations willing to undertake the work. He therefore formed the congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, who took not only the three traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but a fourth vow to devote themselves to the reception, conversion and salvation of:

...girls and women who, having fallen into debauchery, wish to withdraw from it in order to be converted to God, all shall be received...provided that one recognises in them the following qualities:

1. That they appear touched by God and wish to be converted.
2. That they enter voluntarily the said House; for one is not obliged to take them by force or by constraint.
3. That they are without doubt not pregnant, or infected with some sickness which could cause harm to the others.⁵⁴

As the founder intended, "this vow added a particular apostolic orientation to the other vows and effected a greater stability in the vocation".⁵⁵ The sisters were dressed all in white, with a blue cross embroidered on the dress and a silver heart bearing an image of the Virgin and child surrounded by lilies and roses, suspended from the neck. They were popularly called "The White Sisters". The white garments were symbolic of virginal purity; the penitent girls whom they took in were directed by the founder simply to be "modestly" dressed.

In order that his spiritual daughters might "apply themselves with more affection and courage to the functions of this holy Institute" John Eudes required the sisters to consider often and accept as truth certain statements related to the unchanging *raison d'être* of Christianity:

⁵⁴ From *Constitution I* of St John Eudes written for the original foundation at Caen. I was sent a copy of Constitutions I, II and III taken from a very old printed document by the sister archivist of the congregation of N.D. de Charité (du Refuge) de Caen. They were identical with those in the *Règle de Saint-Augustin et Constitutions pour les Religieuses de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers*, approved by Gregory XVI and published in Rome, 1836.

⁵⁵ From Constitution I in *Constitutions of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, revised according to the Documents of Vatican Council II and post-conciliar pontifical documents*. Promulgated by Mother Mary Aquinas Lee, Sup. General, Rome, Feb. II, 1970.

III. A soul is worth more than a world, and consequently to lend it a hand in order to withdraw it from the abyss of sin, is a thing greater than to create a whole world, and to draw it out of nothingness into being: to direct and guide a soul along the spiritual paths of grace, is a thing more excellent than to govern a world in temporal matters.

IV. A single soul is more precious before God than all the bodies which are in the universe, and consequently, to contribute towards clothing it in the grace of God, to feeding it and strengthening it by good examples and by holy instructions...is an action more holy than to clothe and feed all the bodies on earth: and to deliver a soul from the slavery of sin and the devil, is a work more worthy than to set at liberty all the captives and prisoners in the world; to destroy a sin within a soul, is a greater benefit than to destroy a universal plague; and to make a soul pass from the death of sin to the life of grace is more agreeable to God, than to resuscitate all the bodies that are in the tomb.⁵⁶

The worth of their work and of the religious beliefs of their penitents could not be doubted by the sisters, after frequent consideration of the above articles and the other eight of which they form part, and which are similar in tone. If we read them negatively, another powerful message appears: no considerations of the physical well-being of any amount of "bodies" must be allowed to hinder the work of salvific instruction and practice. This unwritten dictum left very great freedom of choice to the mother superior of each autonomous house with regard to her use of her subordinates' time and of the income which their work brought in (for Constitution I stipulated that the penitents should work for most of their waking hours). She was not commanded to put their physical health before that of their souls, rather the reverse.

Eudes took great care when formulating the regulations for the Daughters of Notre-Dame de Charité du Refuge that there should exist the strictest division between nuns and penitents, apart from necessary contact. The majority of the sisters were to maintain a life of prayer and contemplation within their section of the enclosure. The girls' workroom, refectory, dormitory, garden, courtyard and chapel were to be entirely separated from those of the nuns by a strong wall, within which a cylindrical "tower" was placed with an opening on one side, and turning on a pivot, so that provisions or completed work might be transferred by its means from one side of the

⁵⁶ Under the heading *A SCAVOIR* in Constitution I, Caen document.

wall to the other. There was also a single door by which those nuns chosen by the Mother Superior to supervise the penitents might reach them. These women were designated the "mistresses" of the penitents by Eudes and he expected them to be chosen from the most mature of the sisters. Only girls of spotless reputation were accepted as postulants, and he preferred them to be at least twenty years old. At night the penitents were locked in their dormitory, in which a light was always kept burning before an image of the Virgin, and directly opposite the door, which was pierced by a grille and opened into the nuns' sleeping quarters. The sisters were thus able to see into the room where the penitents slept and enter it if necessary, for the key was on their side. This physical and moral separation was maintained even in the case of a girl who expressed the desire to become a postulant, for the rules required that she be sent to another order to commence her novitiate.

The division of the penitents' day was as follows:

5 a.m. Rise and dress (5.30 a.m. in winter)

5.30 Go to oratory for half an hour of mental prayer

6.00 Work begins and continues through all activities apart from religious services and meals.

Between 6 a.m. and twelve noon, girls heard mass and received some breakfast while working.

Silence kept apart from singing canticles and speech necessary for work.

11.45 Litany of the Saviour followed ;by examination of conscience.

12.00 or 12.30 p.m. Dinner, eaten in silence. Prayers.

1 00 - 2.00 p.m. Recreation. Conversation permitted.

"It will not be suffered them to speak of fashions, vanities and curiosities of the world, neither of any other thing that is not redolent of honesty, modesty and the fear of God. It shall not be permitted them to speak in secret with one another, but when they speak, they shall do so loud enough to be heard. During recreation they shall continue working."

2.00 Passage from a pious book read aloud. Catechism if necessary.

3.00 - 5.00 Vespers and compline. Girls allowed quarter of an hour's reading (optional). Singing of litanies.

5.00 Work resumed. The Chaplet of Our Lady recited aloud by all. Silence, broken only by those who wished to recite a prayer.

6.30 Supper - Pious reading.

7.00 One hour's recreation, while working.

8.00 - 9.00 Time to be used at the discretion; of the mistress.

9.00 Evening prayer

10.00 All to be in bed.⁵⁷

St John Eudes imposed the rule of almost perpetual silence upon the sisters of the order which controlled the refuges, because he believed that "silence was a thing marvellously holy and very agreeable to God", and to practise it was one of the shortest ways to reach perfection. The penitents were to keep the same severe discipline of silence, although it was mitigated by the obligation to sing canticles or say litanies and prayers. No casual conversation at all was allowed outside the two hours of recreation:

In order to satisfy Divine Justice in some part for the sins of speech which they have committed, and to teach them to mortify their tongues, which, according to the Apostle John, is the source of all iniquity, they shall abstain from speech and shall keep silence...⁵⁸

With regard to penitence:

1. They shall often say to themselves...Why did you come here? They shall consider that they are here in order to learn to love God and to begin a new life. They shall know that there is no other way by which they may guarantee themselves from eternal damnation and make themselves worthy one day to see the holy face of God, but that of a genuine penitence;...

2 ...they shall strive...to make themselves agreeable to God and to confound the devil, all the rest of their lives, by their prayers, their fasts, and by all kinds of holy actions, especially by the exercise of humility, obedience and the mortification of their senses and their inclinations.

3 They will fast and take the discipline every Friday...in order to maintain and encourage in themselves the holy virtues.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Règlements pour les Filles et Femmes pénitentes*, "Exercice de la Journée" from the Constitutions in the document printed at Rome in 1836.

⁵⁸ *Règlements* "Du silence qu'elles garderont".

⁵⁹ *Règlements* "De la pénitence qu'elles doivent faire".

If drawn to practise extra penances the women must first ask permission from their mistresses. None might eat or drink outside mealtimes, nor give or lend anything without permission. "One of the principal subjections which they must observe is never to leave their work, without legitimate necessity and without permission...All the reading that they shall do, or hear, shall be from the lives of the saints or the book of the Great Guide of Sinners of Grenada, or the Memorial of the Christian Life or from any book that treats of the four final ends of man, of the Passion of Our Lord or other similar books..."

The very serious, not to say doleful ideas given the girls by their reading matter was to be reinforced by instruction, for under "Other general rules which the Penitents must observe" St John Eudes directed that "They must have often before their eyes, in general, the time that they have lost, the misuse which they have made of the graces accorded them by God...which must encourage them to make up for lost time, to hasten in order to pay the debt of the past..." before death took them into the presence of their Judge. As had been decided centuries before by the canonists, aided by the teaching of the Latin Fathers, a prostitute had no excuse for having taken up her trade; the girls entering the refuge were morally repulsive sinners who had been pardoned and given a new chance of salvation by the exceeding mercy of God. No-one owed them anything, particularly not society, which they had wronged.

The "care of chastity" is minutely discussed in the regulations; in order to combat bad inclinations the penitents must use great restraint in their conversation and abstain from all bodily contact "neither in play nor in friendship" and above all never kiss, or perform "any other indecent action". Immediately following these regulations is the grim command:

For divers necessities which may occur in the House, there shall be a separate room, removed from the regular places, healthy, as much as may be possible,

strong, locked with a key and also with a bar, if there is need, where one may shut up for a time or for ever, those who give cause by their bad conduct or some grave fault; and if any should make difficulties in entering, she shall be forced, and as long as she is there she shall be treated in the manner ordained by the Mother Superior.⁶⁰

The girls were to guard their modesty like nuns, abstaining from all shouting, railing, joking, laughing or indecent gestures. Their eyes were to be lowered most of the time, their walk unhurried, with hands in sleeves. They were never to leave the building assigned to them until they left it to return to the world. If they wished to stay in the refuge for life, they were free to do so.

Although Eudes wished the penitents within his foundation to enter voluntarily, he allowed the Mother Superior to accept the control of houses of correction or to open establishments for the reception of girls and women sent there as a punishment by their parents or the state. This permission compromised the status of his houses as assemblies of voluntary penitents, but it was likely that the rule of his nuns was more merciful than that of the civic authorities whom they replaced.⁶¹ In any case, as the "Considerations" quoted from above insist, physical ills - hunger, nakedness, sickness, death - are nothing compared to the spiritual ills with which a soul outside the grace of God is afflicted, and which will lead to an eternity of torment. For the sake of escape from the latter, and in its place to receive unending happiness, the loss of bodily liberty was a small price to pay.

After receiving papal approval the order of Our Lady of Charity was able to make three more foundations during the seventeenth century, at Rennes, Hennebont and Guingamp. In the eighteenth century houses were opened in Tours, La Rochelle and Paris. These new institutions were not daughter foundations but separate, autonomous houses made by the "hiving off" (*essaimer*) of a small group of trained nuns from any

⁶⁰ *Règlements*, "Autres Règles générales, que toutes les Pénitentes doivent observer".

⁶¹ When the order took charge of the house of correction for women at Rennes in 1673 the nuns found the girls imprisoned, some chained to their beds, fed on black bread and frequently beaten by their male guardians. Henri Gaillac, *Les maisons de correction, 1830-1945, Edition Cujas, Paris*, 1971, p.118.

of the existing houses. In accordance with traditional practice regarding female orders, once the new house had been made its mother superior was under the direct authority of the bishop in whose diocese the group lived. Eudes had wished his institute to be united by nothing more concrete than "a union of hearts".

Madame de Combé's Daughters of the Good Shepherd

Madame de Combé was a Dutch convert to catholicism who was forced by her family to become the wife of a Protestant. Her brief married life was extremely unhappy. After her husband's death she renounced marriage for ever and went to live with her brother's family in Paris. As her relatives refused to allow her to receive Catholic sacraments during a severe illness, she left them and obtained a small pension, thanks to the good offices of a priest of St Sulpice, by then a centre of reformed evangelical catholicism. Combé lived a life of poverty and sacrifice; at some time during the 1680's she began to offer shelter in her own home to prostitute girls who "wished to repent of their miserable state". She founded a small community "of the Magdalen and of the Refuge" in 1686.⁶² With assistance from private charity - which often let her down - and then with the help of the gift of a house and money from Louis XIV in 1688, de Combé was able to keep open a refuge for forty penitents, which she renamed The Community of the Daughters of the Good Shepherd (*La Communauté des Filles du Bon Pasteur*).⁶³ Suspicion and slander came her way. "A wave of hostility towards the Bon Pasteur swept over the Church in Paris", but a powerful protector, Nicolas La Reynie, the magistrate in charge of the police of the capital, saved the house from ruin and royal favour was re-affirmed.

⁶² *Relation abrégée de la vie de Madame de Combé*, Chap. I.

⁶³ I shall call this and related establishments by their French title of "Bon Pasteur" because these two words have passed into the language as a synonym for a penitents' refuge.

Combé died in 1692 without having formulated a set of written rules, but her life was an illustration of how she had wished the inmates to live. After her death so many enquiries were received regarding the methods she had used, that it was decided to print a copy of the regulations that were actually in practise "to avoid the mistakes that slip into manuscript copies".⁶⁴ Apparently the foundress identified closely with her charges, with whom she spent the whole day. She shared their food and their work; if she ordered a girl to perform a penance (no description given in the text), she would often undergo it herself, side by side with the other. No fees were charged "as in the other refuges in Paris". Combé insisted that the girls should enter of their own free will. They might leave if they wished, but in cases where she believed the girl's soul would be lost if she quitted the house prematurely, Combé would sometimes agree to the use of physical restraint for a while.

The "Regulations" contained in the second half of the *Relation* were a summary of her practice, written down after her death by the lay sisters who came to live with her and care for the girls. These women copied the foundress by sharing the food, occupations and dress of the penitents, which was a thick brown woollen garment, with a leather belt and steel buckle. The sisters also wore a medallion showing Jesus the Good Shepherd on one side and for this reason were popularly called *Pastorines*. All the women had the head shaven and covered with a woollen cap and a bonnet, the latter in cotton for the penitents and taffeta for the sisters. The *Relation* gives the staff of the house the courtesy title "sister", but there is no evidence that they, any more than the foundress, had taken formal vows.

Combé imposed a period of probation on new inmates, who had the severity of the rules carefully explained to them. As with all other refuges studied both before and after the Revolution of 1789, only young girls or women were accepted, free of domestic ties and with no communicable diseases. In a document mentioned in the

⁶⁴ *Relation abrégée*, from the *Avertissement*.

Relations, called "General Advice to the Penitent Girls" the foundress insists on the poverty, silence and blind obedience expected of the community. No "special friendships" were tolerated, nor conversations that were "too human". The penitents remained within the enclosure at all times. Silence was to be kept all day, the senses continually mortified and the self constantly denied. Work commenced at 6.30 a.m. and was carried on until nine or ten at night, according to the season. As in the Eudist refuges, it was carried on regardless of other occupations, such as singing and the recitation of prayers or while listening to pious reading. The foundress said: "Man is born to work and the sinner is condemned to work; the penitent submits to it to expiate a life passed in idleness or crime."⁶⁵ With regard to this we see that the mercy of God expressed by de Combé gave the recipient no chance to plead that she had been forced into prostitution. It was axiomatic that the sinner had had free will with which to reject sin, particularly of course if she had been baptised, a sacrament which gives the baby a measure of the grace of God. The penitents' dormitory was meant to represent the image of the tomb. The girls shared a room but each had her own curtained bed. They were to undress and sleep within the drawn curtains. Before sleeping one of them was to say "Let us think, sisters, that we are on our deathbeds." Afterwards all but one lamp was extinguished and the door of the dormitory locked on the outside.

If a girl left with a record of good behaviour, she might return later if she wished. The desire of the foundress, however, was rather that all the girls should live the rest of their lives apart from the world. When she first opened her refuge, Combé had said to her penitents:

Rejoice, my dear children, we will never leave our sure and holy retreat. Our feeble imagination will no longer be assailed by unwelcome ideas that going out into the town might renew; we shall stay buried here with Jesus Christ in silence, peace and solitude.

⁶⁵ *Relation abrégée*, p.114.

The two refuges just described had no contact with one another, as far as is known, but they resemble each other closely. There is the same attempt to confine the penitents both physically and psychologically by permitting them to hear and see nothing outside work and religion. Physical contact is forbidden or discouraged in the name of that nameless horror, unnatural love. This fear of the flesh and of human affection was not confined to congregations in charge of refuges: it is an innate quality of monastic Christianity. However, as pornography of the past and sociological studies of the present time demonstrate, prostitute women often seek sexual pleasure from each other out of disdain for men, so that the incidence of lesbian contacts, or of attempts to form them, may have been higher in a penitents' refuge than it would be in an ordinary convent. Hence St John Eudes' terrible, almost casual phrase "or for ever" in the rule prescribing the use of solitary confinement for rebellious girls. In this context there does seem to be a difference between the convents of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge and the little house of the Bon Pasteur in Paris. There was no recommendation given by Combé for the perpetual imprisonment of the girls, neither did she seek to divide the pure from the impure: her lay sisters shared the life of the penitents. Her personal presence, her humility and the example of equality with the girls that she gave suggest that the success that made others keen to imitate her methods was based not so much on her rules but on the caring spirit with which they were enforced.

With regard to the occupations of the day, the hours of work were not abnormal for the time, but the control of speech was intended to be a painful discipline. It was the imposition of a forbidding and unworldly feature of monastic life upon subjects who had no monastic calling. Other routines belonging to the convent were also prescribed, but to them was added the extra discipline, more suitable to the secular workshop, of being obliged to continue one's task almost without interruption. Both Eudes and Combé wished the women to accept the suffering that the régime was

bound to cause as a penitential sacrifice whereby divine justice might be satisfied. Although the work of both founders encountered hostility, it was by no means new to catholicism, but merely continued a tradition already well established. The following brief history of the Penitents' Charity of Avignon, taken from a book published by an amateur historian, Dr P. Pansier, in 1910, represents a "flashback" meant to show how little difference there was between a thirteenth century and a seventeenth century refuge, except that the former institution became more repressive with the passage of time.

The Penitents' Charity at Avignon

This foundation was made by Bishop Zoen in the middle of the thirteenth century, and contained five penitents who lived in very modest circumstances. It was enlarged in 1343 under the patronage of Gasbert du Val, a member of the papal court of John XXII, after the Holy See took refuge in Avignon during the fourteenth century. Built on a former execution site, the house was dedicated to St Mary Magdalene of Miracles. Records exist of its regulations which directed that the women inside it be dressed uniformly in black and white after the fashion of widows, that they should have the title "sister" and that they should make a solemn promise to "keep obedience and my body in chastity with firm intent and good will to stay all my life in the company of the sisters".⁶⁶ The conditions of admission were framed to ensure that the refuge should not be used as a charity for prostitutes who had been brought to apply for shelter because of old age and want. It would seem that the bishop, whose nominees had framed the regulations, wished to place in seclusion women who were still desirable, whose loss to the community might presumably be a check on illicit sexuality.

⁶⁶ Pansier, *L'Oeuvre des Repenties*, Appendix II: Second chapter of the Rule of the House of Penitents of St Mary Magdalene of Miracles, 1376.

None will be received save only young women of the age of 25 years, who in their youth have been licentious and who by their beauty and grace could by worldly frailty be still inclined to worldly pleasure and into this tempt and attract men totally.⁶⁷

It appears from the rules that the refuge was run as a community of equals, with all members, both those who had entered as supervisors and those whose past had been wanting in virtue, being allowed to vote in chapter. There was also an insistence that new inmates should be taught good manners. Nothing was said about hours of work, although the group must have done something to support itself. No limit was set upon the number of women who might be received, but from 1343 up to the seventeenth century the records rarely show more than fifteen sisters. Over the considerable time-span covered by the documents studied by Pansier, the penitents' charity twice fell into decadence and was twice revived under a different patron saint by various ecclesiastical benefactors in conjunction with pious laypeople. The model of daily life was always conventual, but the penitents proper were made distinctly subordinate to the lay sisters after the fifteenth century. There was a noticeable increase in the severity of the discipline, penances and number of religious exercises imposed on the inmates when the rules were revised by the College of Jesuits in 1627 and the house put under the direction of a board of male directors, responsible to the bishop. Even before this there were rules which restricted the use of speech, dictated its subjects and prohibited special friendships and physical contact even of the most innocent kind. The mother superior had discretionary powers where punishments were concerned, although she had to seek the bishop's permission to use the most severe, such as imprisonment in the convent dungeon.

In 1651 additional articles were added to the statutes to permit the reception of women brought into the house against their will. By this date new buildings had been erected (on the site of a former Jewish cemetery) in the form of a typical convent. By

⁶⁷ Pansier, footnote to p.40.

the end of the seventeenth century the voluntary character of the charity had been gravely compromised by the number of girls who were placed there following the Louis XIV's ordinances of 1684 which gave families the right to imprison recalcitrant junior members.⁶⁸ The Penitents' Charity served this purpose together with a House of the Bon Pasteur opened in Avignon in 1702 by one of Combé's imitators.⁶⁹ The older penitents' refuge continued to exist until the Revolution of 1789, after which it was dissolved together with all other religious foundations in France. Its buildings were acquired in the nineteenth century by a branch of St John Eudes' order of Our Lady of Charity, whose congregation had by then split into two and become enormously increased.

The quality of mercy

Although the emphasis placed by religion on a life of penitence and prayer for the women in the refuges is alien to the contemporary mind, the sincerity of the involvement of clergy and benefactors with the spiritual evolution of the penitents, and the value placed on it must have created an atmosphere in which dignity and self respect were possible. The austerity of their life and the constant surveillance to which they were subjected, did not preclude the penitents' having a very high idea of their own value, if they could accept the religious beliefs of their custodians. In article X of the section entitled *A SCAVOIR* within the Constitutions written for the White Sisters, John Eudes calls the nuns of his order co-workers with Jesus Christ and daughters of Our Lady, if they "employed their mind and their heart, their care and their industry" in

⁶⁸ Colin Jones, "Prostitution and the Ruling Class in 18th-century Montpellier", *History Workshop*, Issue 6, Autumn 1978, p. 8. These measures aimed to preserve the respectable from the disgrace or dishonour attached to reckless or immoral behaviour on the part of their children of either sex or related female dependents. Heads of families were permitted to put erring girls or women for correctional training either in convents (if they could afford it) or in general hospitals. The general hospitals were created at royal request in most major town and cities in France in the last half of the 17th century. They were not hospitals in the strict sense of the word, but rather institutions which aimed simultaneously at the relief of the poor and the repression of what Jones happily calls "the crimes of poverty".

⁶⁹ An article by I. Pigoullié, "Les oeuvres de charité accueillant les femmes à Avignon à l'époque moderne", *Etudes vauclusiennes*, 1985, nos.33,36, suggests that good results were accomplished, but that the severity of the rules does not always permit one to distinguish "*moral assainissement*" from the effects of repression.

the salvation of souls. The spiritual atmosphere within a refuge dominated by such principles might therefore be highly rarefied. There were the penitents, outcast by the world yet regarded within the cloister as infinitely valuable, making by their corporal sufferings a pathway which would eventually lead them, via purgatory, to endless joy in the very presence of God. Facing them figuratively speaking across the gulf of lost honour were the religious sisters, whose acknowledged superiority of position only compelled them to imitate Christ and his mother the more, even in thought. They already possessed divine favour, for their founder had told them that "there are no persons in the world that he loves more, than those who co-operate with him in the salvation of souls." Within this world view, treatment that might appear cruel to outsiders could be administered in love, just as, in the field of medical practice, bleeding, purging and cauterisation were given in good faith to those who were physically sick. The underlying intention was positive and benevolent.

Mme de Combé's life expressed the same theme; such was her reverence for the penitents that, the *Relation* tells us, she would often kneel and kiss their feet. This is not to say that her love was personal: she saw Christ in them. Love between "creatures", with the common marks of affection by which it is expressed, was a forbidden thing within the closed community, yet in the name of the Good Shepherd, or of Mary, maternal tenderness could "clothe with grace" a relationship which might otherwise be seen by the penitent as detached from feeling but which was, in its own terms, devoted to a merciful aim.

One must never forget, when considering Catholic institutions of previous centuries which offered care to the helpless, that any physical care given to those they controlled was of secondary importance to the chief aim, which was to bring the souls of their subjects to salvation as interpreted by the Church. This meant above all to save them from hell, a place whose terror was understood intimately by some of the elect. A popular missionary of the eighteenth century, Father Jacques Brydaine (1701-

1767),⁷⁰ was a man penetrated with the fear of God and of the necessity that all should be convinced of the great suffering men and women must look for, if they would not accept the ministrations of the Church.

Oh! the cruel reflexions that will come to a damned soul in hell....Oh regrets! Oh repentance! Oh tears! Oh fury! Oh despair! Oh madness! Fire and flames of the abyss, worms that gnaw without pity, beds of coals forever burning, hellish monsters....One should, according to a saintly doctor of the Church, regard all these...agonies, all these torments...as but the playfulness of the wrath of God, the prelude to his vengeance...Oh my God how horrible it is, for a sinner, to fall into your hands!⁷¹

To be able to save even one soul from an eternity such as this must be, to any reasonable person who believes the doctrine "a work more worthy than to set at liberty all the captives and prisoners in the [present ephemeral] world".⁷²

Although an institution sanctioned by the Church might in any century perpetuate the mercy traditionally enjoined towards harlots seeking salvation, by the time of the Reformation the state had its own developed legal system and was taking on itself the responsibilities formerly held to belong more to the Church than to the king. Having accepted the prostitute as a public utility, when it attempted to reform her the idea of physical repression took precedence over ministry to whatever spiritual needs she may have had.

A.J-B. Parent Duchâtelet, a doctor active in the first third of the nineteenth century in Paris, was able to describe the conditions in the prostitutes' section of the Salpêtrière, the great general hospital built in the seventeenth century to confine female poor in the capital, thanks to the evidence he obtained from a former surgeon to the

⁷⁰ He preached 256 major missions in France, mainly in rural areas.

⁷¹ *Sermons du Pere Brydayne, Missionnaire Royal*, 4th Edition, Vol. I, Paris & Lyon, 1867, pp. 226 and 232.

⁷² See Eudes' recommendations to his nuns, above.

hospital and from an elderly laywoman, known as Sister Pelagia, who had been employed there before the Revolution.

This division of the Salpêtrière was uniquely destined for prostitutes, who were known as "women of the world" (*filles du monde*). A good number of these girls found themselves there because of a *lettre de cachet*; they stayed there three, six and nine years; some of these last stayed there more than fifteen or twenty years. I begged Sister Pelagia to explain to me the reasons for this long detention, but she has never consented to give me the slightest help in this regard.

The beds were supposed to serve for six persons, but as they could only hold four (two at the head and two at the foot) there were always two who slept on the bare tiles, right up to the moment when one of the six had finished her time of detention or was sent to Bicêtre in order to be treated [for advanced syphilis]. Then the next to last took her place in the bed and another, destined for this same bed, arrived and began to sleep on the floor. No mattress, no straw, no pillow, but the naked ground; only in winter were they given a blanket in which they wrapped themselves.

The ceiling of the rooms in which these beds were placed was only raised five feet above the tiles; the windows, set very far apart and only opening on one side of the room, were only two feet square, which made ventilation very difficult. The walls were so close together that the two people sleeping on the tiles completely obstructed the passage. According to Sister Pelagia these rooms, always very damp, were never cold in winter; but there was always an unclean odour, particularly in the mornings. Sister Pelagia gave the women a reading from a pious book twice a day and on Sundays a priest came to give them communion. The prostitutes stayed in this prison until the massacres of the 2nd and 3rd September, 1793, for political prisoners had been accumulated there. Measures were taken to remove the prostitutes only two days before the massacres. They were afterwards confined in Saint Lazare.⁷³

With regard to a private charity which became a dependent of the civic authorities, J.C. Delannoy's brief account of the refuge at Amiens illustrates the same heartless severity and neglect as that suffered by the *filles du monde*, at least within the eighteenth century.⁷⁴ Colin Jones, in the article for *History Workshop* previously

⁷³ A.J-B. Parent Duchatelet, *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, Paris, 1857 (2nd ed) pp. 99,100.

⁷⁴ J.C. Delannoy, *Pécheresses et Repenties; notes pour servir à l'histoire de la Prostitution à Amiens du XIV au XIX siècle*, brochure, 1943.

referred to, says that in France the attitude towards poverty and charity had changed by 1740, away from the desire to confine in order to correct the poor, and towards an understanding that there could be such a thing as the deserving poor, who might be visited and helped in their homes, leaving institutional care for those whose lives were marginally criminal. With regard to correctional establishments in Montpellier at least, this meant that a female procurer was given a much longer sentence of imprisonment inside the city refuge than a girl taken in clandestine prostitution. The house, called the Bon Pasteur, run by lay sisters, was neglected by its noble patrons and so left more fully under the authority of the *Bureau de police*.⁷⁵ This resulted in a change in which "the values of the prison and the reformatory were coming to supplant those of the convent."⁷⁶ From the mid-century onwards, Jones asserts, the Bon Pasteur was clearly pre-figuring the model prisons of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Although this may well be true, in the establishment which he describes, the use of the whip as a punishment for recalcitrant girls was the only feature *not* found in the convent-refuges founded by St John Eudes and Madame de Combé a century earlier. The use of silence, the requirement to work all the time, even during religious exercise, which Jones takes to be the sign of a downgrading of piety, were part of the discipline of the original religious houses. In fact the model prisons of nineteenth century France were run very much like the old convent refuges, rather than the other way around, whether the innovators knew it or not.

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The history of the charity for penitents at Avignon and the account of the beginnings of the Eudist foundation and of the Bon Pasteur show that over a very long time-span the Church relied upon a method of conditioning disgraced and sexually

⁷⁵ Jones calls these women "nuns" but I think that they would have been Pastorines, who were lay sisters.

⁷⁶ C. Jones, *op.cit*, pp 14.,15.

experienced women which was almost identical with that applied to young virgins entering an enclosed convent as postulants. They were clothed, fed and controlled with regard to movement and the occupation of space by rules presented as part of a holy law. A demanding routine of work and religious exercises was undertaken in conditions of silence and physical restraint alien to normal life by girls whose previous existence had been noticeably undisciplined. No concessions appear to have been made in favour of the women's possible youth or the effects on their health and spirits of such a severe environment, for *theology formed the refuges*. It is not possible to understand what went on within them, and the relationship of the nuns to those subject to them without taking account of this. The Pauline doctrine, confirmed by the Latin Fathers, and lived out particularly by religious orders down the centuries, states that the spirit wars against the flesh, which is hostile to its desire to live in obedience to the will of God. Of even greater importance is the primary teaching of the Church, that those who at death have not been reconciled to God through its sacraments do not merely die, but enter an eternity of torment. These two theological propositions underlay the work of the refuges, which was to save the soul of each penitent woman and tame her bodily desires. In this process her suffering was predicted, and in accordance with doctrines of penitence and satisfaction, which will be examined later, it was also necessary in order to maintain her in a state of humility acceptable to God. This accounts for the striking similarity between these "redemptive" institutions, whether they existed in the South of France, Normandy or Paris, or operated in the thirteenth or the seventeenth centuries. Whatever the individual founder's degree of benevolence towards the subjects, or her desire to repress them, once the institution is set up the uniformity of treatment is remarkable. Centuries go by; the house is still maintained as an enclosed community run by nuns or celibate lay sisters, and depending on the spirit of those in authority, the place may be either likened to a convent or a prison. The slow rate of change or virtual lack of it, is noticeable in the history of them all. What might be considered to have been a new and merciful attempt to care for the outcast in the twelfth century, when Foulques de Neuilly filled the

convent of St Anthony with repentant sinners, was still seen as radical and unusually benevolent over five hundred years later, when St John Eudes opened his refuge for former prostitutes at Caen, and examples of both foundations were still functioning up to the time of the first Revolution. May we then ask if, over this great period of time, there was not created in French society an idea of what a "good prostitute" should be like? Is there any resemblance between the obedient "bad girl" in a refuge, modestly dressed, quietly behaved, whose body was not really her own, and the obedient "fille" who followed all the regulations newly devised by the Prefecture in enlightened, civilised Paris of the nineteenth-century? Again, may we ask if nineteenth-century French culture displayed any marks of previous religious indoctrination in its attitude to the moral worth of the prostitute? Did she still incarnate the most filthy of sins? Was there any hope for her?

Chapter II - Images of the prostitute in nineteenth century France

During the long period from the time of the first Popes to the eve of the French Revolution the Roman Catholic Church had always presented Christianity as a religion of renunciation, and this was particularly true after the Council of Trent. In France the Church had as it were resumed the task previously undertaken between the sixth and eleventh centuries, and by the middle of the eighteenth had once again been successful in "imposing on the mass of French men and women a difficult and demanding religion...obsessed with guilt and sin", particularly with sexual sin.¹ Both then and in the following century it is difficult to overemphasize the negativity of the Church towards the human body, which it held to be "an object of shame and repulsion". Under the influence of the Counter Reformation human sexuality was culpabilised even more than in the Middle Ages. The great spiritual sins of anger, envy and pride were made to take second place to the bodily vices of gluttony, idleness and lust. Gibson cites the evidence of French historians to show that in France sexual sin was treated as the most grave of all, one which could permeate even the most trivial acts, and in the seminary this was particularly true. Thus clerics were advised, when dressing, to "pick up their underwear 'with sentiments of compunction...lamenting the loss of our innocence'".² Even before 1789 this "difficult and demanding religion" encountered resistance at many levels of society, and almost wholesale rejection immediately after. But whereas historians have found that, in response to this, the Church in the nineteenth century eventually shifted the emphasis on the way it "sold" its message away from the wrath of God to His love and mercy, no similar evidence has been produced so far that it made any change affecting its age-old antagonism towards sexuality. It is not possible to illustrate this by positive evidence, for the way the Church handled the subject was by silence and repression. One simply cannot find in the two centuries

¹ R. Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism; 1789-1914*, p.269.

² Gibson, p.24.

prior to our own, pious literature dealing with the subject of human sexuality, except within manuals for confessors, in which it is treated only as the expression of a variety of forms of sin. (Even there, anything explicit is printed in Latin.) Even the prestigious *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (1908 - 1926) gives no space at all to a discussion of sexuality, but a great deal to that of chastity, and even more to *luxure*, in its meaning of specifically sexual pleasure. It pronounces that apart from the opinions of four authorities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (one of whom, the Jesuit Thomas Sanchez, later conformed to orthodoxy) "all theologians agree" from the early years of the Church "up to the present day", that to provoke directly or accept freely sexual pleasure - even by such a little thing as a kiss or a touch - is an essentially evil act, and one that necessarily must count as a *mortal sin*.³ This is evidence of such a sustained condemnation of sexual love by what had been its national Church, that it must necessarily have made a deep impression on French culture as a whole, indeed the association of sexual desire with sin has marked all cultures which have adopted Christianity as their major religion.⁴ This has necessarily meant that one of the most important areas of human relations, with all its potential for love or hate between the sexes, had formerly been judged unworthy of a place at table at the "party of humanity". Accordingly Choderlos de Laclos' *Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), a work based on observed reality in the realm of sexual love, was judged obscene as if it were on the same level as the fantasies of de Sade, and banned in France between 1815 and 1875.

But the nineteenth century was the age of revolution; France, which had seen its Church discredited by the *philosophes* then mauled by the First Republic, produced many men and women for whom the changes of government and social

³ This judgement is based largely on the decisions of Popes Clement VIII and Paul V, who ordered that those who claimed that a kiss, an embrace or a touch given or received with sexual pleasure did not constitute a grave sin, should be denounced to the Inquisition. Col. 1342. The writer on *Luxure* betrays his own bias by saying at the beginning of the article that *délectation charnelle* is not sinful inside marriage, and then, as his explanation proceeds, declaring that "as we have said" *all* such pleasure is intrinsically evil. Col. 1348.

⁴ I do not intend to imply that guilt and ambivalence with regard to sexual love is not present in non-Christian civilisations.

structure were a powerful stimulus to explore previously forbidden territory in the world of ideas. Women as a sex, the treatment of the poor and the imprisoned were three areas of interest which led to both intellectual and direct action, and which were related to prostitution at least secondarily. Owing to improvements in the printing industry Western Europe enjoyed a great increase in publications of all kinds, but France was the first to produce a significant number dealing with the trade in sex, its diseases and the problems it represented for a modern state. Alain Corbin's bibliography for *Les Filles de Noce*⁵ shows 113 works published in the nineteenth century which relate to prostitution, treating it as a subject for social concern rather than from the point of view of the literary voyeur or the inquiring tourist. A percentage of these publications are articles written for specialised journals, but most are books which were available to the general public.

Out of the few examples to appear before 1850 one of the earliest and most famous was *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, published by A.J.B. Parent-Duchâtelet in 1836, a work which was one of the most influential of its kind ever produced. Corbin says of it:

For more than half a century no French author wishing to write of the trade in love found himself capable of doing so without reference to the model set up in 1836 by *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*. Later historians, dazzled by the high quality of the enquiry, but also guided by the conviction that prostitution does not fall within the domain of history, shamelessly reproduced results obtained under the Restoration.⁶

All the specialised writers on prostitution quoted in this chapter make frequent reference to Parent's book and at least one major literary author, Honoré de Balzac, had read it shortly after its publication. In Frégier's very popular *Les Classes Dangereuses* the section on prostitution is almost completely lifted from Parent's book.⁷ Its author and his work therefore deserve to be first in the series of

⁵ A. Corbin, *Les filles de noce: misère sexuelle et prostitution aux 19e et 20e siècles*, Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1978.

⁶ *Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet; la prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle*. Text presented and annotated by A. Corbin, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1981.

⁷ Frégier, H.A. *Les Classes Dangereuses de la Population dans les Grandes Villes*, Paris, 1840.

publications discussed in this chapter, which gave the female prostitute more attention than she had received in any other period of European history. That this literature failed to find any positive answers to the questions her existence raised is closely tied to the moral and theological systems within which it operated.

A.J.B Parent du Chatelet was a medical doctor born into a catholic family with strong Jansenist sympathies and a long tradition of service to the community through the law, the Church and medicine, given to regular almsgiving, study and hard work.⁸ Registered at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris at the age of nineteen, he soon became a protégé of Hallé, the first to hold the Chair of Medical Hygiene created there in 1795. On Hallé's advice he left general practice to devote himself to the new science, in which he proved himself to be a researcher of skill, imagination and tenacity. Having proved willing to expose himself to filth and physical corruption for the sake of communal health. It was not surprising that his reputation brought him an unusual request. A friend, in contact with The Royal Society for the Amelioration of Prisons, had tried unsuccessfully to interest the prostitutes then confined in the prison of La Force in free copies of morally uplifting literature. He was baffled by his inability to communicate with the women: they seemed to him to belong to a people apart.⁹ He therefore approached Parent Duchâtelet, who was a personal friend, asking him to assist society's understanding of this special class of women by doing research on them as a whole. Parent was reluctant, believing that such philanthropy was misplaced, but he commenced a study none the less. Not long afterwards his friend died, but by this time Parent was interested. He had also been approached by two Brazilian politicians, visitors to Paris, with a request for information regarding the methods used in France to supervise the health and activities of prostitutes. Parent took them to the Prefecture of Police, where to his

⁸ *Notice Historique* of Vol. I of *Prostitution, etc.*, edition of 1857, and confirmed by the relevant section of *Notre famille: généalogie*, by Col. Parent-Duchâtelet, Imprimerie de la Chapelle-Montligeau, (Orne) 1939. The present holder of what remains of the family archives, M. Michel Vinot-Préfontaine, said that his family had come from "a Jansenist environment where pleasure did not exist."

⁹ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution*, Introduction to Vol.I, p.3.

surprise he found that there was no official policy, nor anyone who appeared to know what went on in the *bureau des moeurs* as a whole. He also discovered that the government of Brazil was not the only body which looked to France for this sort of guidance:

My researches in the archives of the Prefecture of Police soon furnished me with proof that the happy results of the sanitary surveillance obtained in Paris over several years had come to the knowledge of a large number of administrators, either in other French cities or in foreign countries. Leaving aside the letters addressed to the Prefect of Police by mayors and prefects, I may say that correspondence came from Rome, Naples, Milan and most of the big cities of Germany, Holland and Belgium. One was dated from St Petersburg, another from the United States of America. All demanded information about what was done in the capital of France; but as such information requires the existence of detailed notes, which no-one in the *bureau* had had the time to do, it was found impossible to give this information, and it was always necessary, when answering, to say something very general - a good way to handle questions which one cannot answer.¹⁰

Even the French government, on two separate occasions (1819 and 1822) had not been able to get precise information from the Prefecture. For this reason the provinces were not yet employing the regulation system. Such a state of affairs was a spur to Parent's zeal and patriotism. He wished to provide a source-book of information for France and the world, based on the developing science of statistics, on facts personally verified: those who wrote on social questions without ever leaving their studies earned his contempt.

His study was published at the end of a period of eight years in which he claimed to have read every major book on prostitution available to him, and visited brothels, hospitals and prisons, where he interviewed the inmates and those in authority over them. The public was shown an image of the prostitute's life in which love had no place. Parent described major aspects of what forms of control she experienced, both on the streets, in the brothels and in prison. Her sexual diseases and the condition of her body were thoroughly examined; the departments of France from which she generally came, her family background, her intelligence

¹⁰ Parent-Duchatelet, Vol.I, p.5.

and the level of her education, if any, were also meticulously gone into. Parent undertook this study in addition to his regular work for the *Conseil général* and his medical practice, which by this time was taken up entirely by charitable work for the poor.¹¹ To safeguard his reputation he never went to places where prostitutes were found unaccompanied by either a doctor or an agent of the *bureau*. He was also given access to the archives of the Prefecture, finding that he was the first who had ever studied them, and the last, for after his examination the files were destroyed. In addition he was allowed to examine the registers of the *bureau des mœurs*, where he conceived a deep admiration for the staff, one which must have opened many doors:

There I found men of consummate merit, immense experience and who...render public service all the more meritorious in that it is recompensed in the meanest manner. I shall render these men their due, and by making known the good they do, I like to think that the public will repent of the unjust prejudice which it has with regard to them.¹²

Corbin says that Parent's work gave great coherence and prestige to a system of surveillance merely "sketched by the Consulate" before being taken over by the July Monarchy, and that even the police of the Second Empire were guided by his study.¹³ Whatever the author's prejudices - his adhesion to Jansenist doctrine, with its heightened sensitivity to sin, his strong class feeling, his fear of sex, his desire to see the state treat prostitution not as a human problem but as a question of hygiene - Parent's concern for the women involved is evident. His decision to allow this to appear in his report was brave, even original. For him, to report one's findings was the first duty of a researcher who belonged to "the enlightened nineteenth century" as he called it.

In the first volume of *De la Prostitution* the author speaks of the prostitutes' good qualities, their generosity to the poor, their desire to rear their own children,

¹¹Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Princeton, 1985, p.97

¹²Parent-Duchatelet, Vol.I, p.13.

¹³Corbin, *Les Filles de noce*,

their helplessness when pitted against the madams, their youth and the surprisingly innocent character of the books with which the literate few sometimes idled away their leisure hours, as well as the way in which they would foolishly spend money on vanities. Parent noted with surprise that flowers were often one of these. Corbin says that his discoveries lend credence to the popular image of the golden-hearted prostitute reflected in books and films of the present century. The doctor also found that the women's average health was better than that of the working-class mother, burdened with a family and a twelve-hour working day. Although devout, he sympathised with the girls' indifference to the religious instruction given them in prison by chaplains and nuns, who made no allowance for their different experience of life. His work drew the whore out of the realm of public fantasy and gave her a place in the area of known facts - an essential step towards attaining tolerance and understanding for her, although whether she has attained it even today is questionable. Where prostitution is concerned, history moves very slowly.

The Regulated Girl

Dr. Louis Fiaux, an abolitionist and authority on the treatment of syphilis in the nineteenth century, wrote that in 1802 the *police des mœurs* (controlled by the *deuxième section* which dealt with maintenance of public decency) had three aims: to repress and enclose the free prostitute population which was a cause of public scandal and frequent complaints to the municipality of Paris; to offer to the crowd of searching males - the celibate, the divorced, the sexually "obsessed" - and also to the large number of visitors from the provinces and abroad, a reserve of available sexual partners; lastly, by a deliberate medical and administrative intervention, to safeguard the health of "tainted" women, who were promptly interned until pronounced cured. The brothels and streets were thereby to be kept supplied with a constantly cleansed personnel.¹⁴ To do this it was necessary to force all known

¹⁴ Dr.L. Fiaux, *La Prostitution Cloîtrée*, F. Alcan, Paris, 1902, p.49. The medical visit was as follows: the dispensary at the Prefecture was open between 11.30 a.m. and 4 p.m. on week-days.

prostitutes to submit to periodic inspections to identify those with syphilis or gonorrhoea, and, if infected, to force them to submit to treatment. Those who were found to have disobeyed the regulations were either fined or made to spend a period of time in prison. The sentences ranged from a week to nine months in duration.

Parent found that once a girl was found to be either an inmate of a brothel, or practising on her own account elsewhere, she was brought to the Prefecture to be "inscribed" or "carded" (*mise en carte*). Inscription applied to prostitutes who were resident in a brothel and could not practise outside it. "The card" was carried by the women who worked on their own account.¹⁵ The document had her personal details on one side and a list of rules on the other. (See Appendix to this chapter.) At the time of registration the girl was also required to sign an "*engagement*" in which she promised to keep the rules given to her. Once registered the prostitute was not allowed to give up her trade unless formally struck off (*rayée*) by an agent of the Prefecture, after an enquiry.

A glance at these rules shows that they allowed great freedom of interpretation to the police.¹⁶ Girls in brothels were made subject to even greater restrictions on their liberty, as they were dependent on the owner for permission to leave the house at all. It was inevitable that both house girls and free-lance prostitutes were often found in breach of the regulations, particularly regarding the medical examination which was humiliating, and which could rob them of their livelihood if it found them to be infected. Thus they became liable to various fines and terms of imprisonment in Saint Lazare. All girls on the police files, whether

Two doctors were present, although until 1879 only one had been available. The woman stayed alone with the doctor. He examined her face, mouth and throat, then he made her get up on to the armchair. (At first the girls had been asked to lie down on a bed, but as this necessitated that they removed their hats, which took time, an armchair on a small dais had been substituted.) He inspected the external genitalia, anus, perineum, skin of thighs and belly; if negative he introduced the speculum and examined the neck of the womb and vagina. If both parties were experienced, this could take only one minute. Usually the doctor was so busy that it had to take a minute, with consequent neglect of basic hygiene. Emile Richard, *La Pros. à Paris*, p. 65. Richard said that the system had been the same for at least fifty years.

¹⁵ A man living off the earnings of a free-lance prostitute was punished by law; a brothel owner was protected by legislation, in fact his license to trade was granted by the Prefecture. This is still the case.

¹⁶ See Appendix 2 and the end of the book.

operating from a brothel or from the streets, were known as *les soumises*, the subjected or the obedient, as opposed to those women who tried to carry on their trade clandestinely, with the same freedom from supervision as their clients enjoyed. They were known as *les insoumises*, the unsubjected, a term which can also be used in other contexts to mean "the rebellious" or even "the undefeated". The *soumises* fell into two sub-classes, the house girls (*filles de maison*) and the free girls (*filles libres*) who were also sometimes known as the isolated (*les isolées*).

From the point of view of control, the brothel was the best place for a girl; there she was constantly supervised and could be visited once a week *in situ* by a police doctor. House girls had weekly instead of fortnightly visits because it was acknowledged that they worked harder. In other words they could not refuse clients. A little imagination, plus careful reading of the card reproduced in the appendices, suggests an image of the ideal "free" whore, according to the state. One may picture her at any time in the Paris of the last century, walking meekly along one of the less fashionable streets by lamplight, her head decently covered, her dress so modest and unremarkable that one might mistake her for, say, a governess kept out unusually late. During the past fortnight she has been "inspected" and pronounced fit for public use, so she may accost the next male passer-by with a clear conscience. Should he have another woman on his arm, or be accompanied by children, she casts down her eyes, for she dare not address him. If he is alone, a respectful whispered invitation is given: "Listen Monsieur..."¹⁷ At eleven p.m. the exemplary prostitute returns to her lonely room. Perhaps she looks into the street through a crack in the curtains, but however desperate she may be for money, she will not show herself at the window, nor solicit custom from men who may lodge in the house. Forbidden the only company that would receive her, i.e. other women in the same trade, she goes alone to buy food or drink, fearing to be

¹⁷ "*Ecoutez Monsieur...*" given as the opening phrase of the prostitute's attempt to pick up a client in Goncourt's "*La fille Eliza*". The English translation renders this as "Hello darling!", which is much too familiar.

arrested because it is after hours, then returns to eat alone. Should a client visit her, all is done with such discretion that the susceptibilities of other tenants are not wounded, and the whore sleeps at last, as isolated and docile as the poor celibate sewing woman who rents a room under the tiles in the same building. One wonders if such a gentle, undemanding girl could survive on the streets without the illegal protection of a pimp; obviously she would be much better off in the security of a licensed brothel.

Is there not in this image of the state's ideal public woman something reminiscent of the nun? Those in authority over both types favoured the habit of submission as a quality of the first importance; also, even in the case of the prostitute, the women's right over their own sexuality is denied. Both types were barred from personal friendships or immodesty in dress and demeanour. The prostitute's duty to submit to a medical examination of her interior health may also be compared to the nun's duty to submit the condition of her most intimate feelings to the examination of a confessor. Both kinds of women were expected to perform some penitential act if the relevant inspection found fault. For the prostitute in nineteenth century France this was often a period of imprisonment, in fact much of *De la Prostitution* is taken up with a description of the prostitutes' section of Saint Lazare, the great women's prison which took in all delinquent females in the capital and the department of the Seine. In this prison the French state deliberately introduced a congregation of nuns to act as custodians. The regime of silence and submission that they maintained was only a modification of conventual practice, and had little to do with helping the captive women to re-enter civil life.

The Prison for prostitutes

In 1648 the City of Paris opened a converted saltpetre factory on the outskirts of the capital for the confinement of "debauched women and girls". Eleven years later Louis XIV signed the edict creating the General Hospital, the ancestor of the present-

day Bureau d'Assistance Publique,¹⁸ and a sign of the tendency within the history of what may be called social welfare institutions in sixteenth and seventeenth-century European societies, to confine and institutionalise the marginal. He also gave the land and buildings of the Salpêtrière to the new foundation, which was to use them as a place of refuge and confinement for all the homeless and destitute of Paris, which was "infested" with such people to a point beyond the capacity of existing charitable foundations to serve. In a short time thousands of the destitute of both sexes were interned there: beggars, the very old, the blind, the epileptic, the mentally retarded, political criminals and religious heretics (after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes).¹⁹ Eventually a selection was made in favour of the female poor, the males being sent to a similarly large establishment opened to receive them at Bicêtre. "For over two centuries the Salpêtrière housed every imaginable form of social and medical misfit from the lowliest sector of Parisian life."²⁰

In 1684 a special section, had been built within the enclosure for women who had committed "scandalous and public prostitution", in order that they might not corrupt the rest of the inmates.²¹ In time experience demonstrated that an imprisoned prostitute was very liable to turn into a sick woman dying of syphilis, but the problem was deliberately ignored or imperfectly handled during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because of the connection of venereal disease with sexual licence. Dr H Homo, in charge of the prostitutes' dispensary in the town of Chateau Gontier, found that even in the nineteenth century, nuns in the provincial hospitals would not care for women with syphilis.²² It was this conflict of ideals that lay behind the development

¹⁸ The General Hospital centralised the direction of five other hospitals in Paris: La Pitié, Scipion, Bicêtre and La Savonnerie. In 1662 the directors of the General Hospital were given charge of all public hospitals in France. Although the Archbishop of Paris was the head of the board, the running of these hospitals was mostly in lay hands by 1698.

¹⁹ Quotations from the texts of royal edicts given in Larousse: *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX siècle*, 1875.

²⁰ Mark S. Micale, "The Salpêtrière in the Age of Charcot: An Institutional Perspective on Medical History in the Late Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No.4, October 1985.

²¹ The authors of *Justine* and *Manon Lescaut* showed their heroines being sent for correction by the state to this section of the Salpêtrière.

²² Dr H. Homo, *Etude sur la Prostitution dans la Ville de Chateau-Gontier*, Paris, 1872.

of Saint Lazare, originally a lepers' hospital, then a monastery. After the Revolution of 1789 it was used as a women's prison, but not at first for the confinement of delinquent prostitutes. It received its infamous character, so damaging to any woman known to have been shut up there, because the regulation system created a multitude of offences which prostitutes were sent to prison for, and among them was the crime of being infected with a sexual disease. Much as the authorities would have liked to segregate the criminal offenders from wretched street women caught working while infected with syphilis, the city of Paris never consented to provide money for new buildings.²³ By 1835 all prostitutes found to be infected with syphilis or gonorrhoea were automatically sent to St Lazare's Second Section, and treated as prisoners, as were any public women caught in breach of the Regulations.

The prison was large; it could hold 1200 prisoners as well as staff. Its infirmary contained not only infected prostitutes but also destitute women found to be suffering from venereal diseases, raped children who had thereby been infected with syphilis and the blind and the disabled who had been driven into prostitution by want. The sections were as follows: the First for women awaiting trial or sentence for criminal offences, together with those condemned to less than two years in gaol; the Second for public women in breach of police regulations; the Third for children from the age of six years and young girls detained by the state under Sections 66 and 67 of the Penal Code, as having offended public decency while still lacking adult discernment, or found to be living in conditions of moral danger (a ludicrous provision, considering the nature of Saint Lazare). Trébuchet and Duval, in one of their unmarked insertions in the 1857 edition of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, say that the Second Section (excluding the Infirmary) contained about 450 women at a time, and Pauline de Grandpré gives the same number for 1869.²⁴ Both sources give

²³ The Prefecture of Police asked unsuccessfully for either money or an extra building in 1842, 1843, 1849, 1851 and again in 1868 and especially in 1869, when the former debtors' prison of Clichy became vacant. The Department of the Seine put it up for public auction instead of allowing it to be used to segregate the youngest female offenders from the older women in Saint Lazare, and yet the prison of La Petite Roquette had been set aside for young males. Maxime du Camp, *op.cit.*, p.622.

²⁴ P. de Grandpré (real name Pauline Chevalier) *Les condamnées de Saint-Lazare, mémoires par*

the total number of prison inmates as between 1000 and 1200. The public assumption, so damaging for ex-prisoners, that Saint Lazare was only for prostitutes had some truth in it therefore, in that between one third and nearly a half of its inmates were in the Second Section.

When Parent-Duchâtelet was allowed to inspect the prison in the 1830's he found the interior organisation of its dormitories and workshops more liberal than it afterwards became. The staff of the prison was secular, composed of both men and women. This changed in 1836 when Baron Gabriel Delesserts was appointed Prefect of Police in the capital. A man of culture and refinement, loyal to the Orleans branch of the royal family, a Jansenist with a reputation for incorruptibility and personal courage, Delesserts may not have known Parent-Duchâtelet personally, but he effected changes in the prison which accorded with the recommendations made in the chapter on Saint Lazare in the latter's book. In a few months he had tightened discipline; the prisoners were put into uniform, coloured according to section. Later on he changed the staff, being concerned to appoint only women of good moral character as supervisors and jailors in all sections.²⁵ A typed document, dated December 1931, in the Police Archives in Paris, gives Delessert the credit for being the first to entrust the surveillance of female prisoners entirely to women. He was able to do so for all except a small section of Saint Lazare from July 1838. On 6 April 1839 the Minister of the Interior decided to apply a similar reform to all central prisons and houses of correction attached to them. In a circular of 22 May 1841 the following paragraph appears:

The Administration has decided that one of the most effective means of hastening this happy innovation would be to seek the help of sisters of charity. This institution, so precious with regard to our benevolent institutions, would appear to be no less useful to our penal establishments, by offering discipline's two most important guarantees, the force provided by a vocation and the authority of a good example. It was with this aim in mind that Messieurs the inspectors general of prisons within the kingdom received two years ago

Mme..., Paris 1869. This was a factual account of the structure and organisation of the prison, with a romanticised view of the prisoners, written by a niece of the then prison chaplain.

²⁵ L'abbé Mortier, *Bonne Mère, ou La Révérende Mère Chupin*, Soc. St Augustin, Desclée et Brouwer, Paris, 1926, p.48.

particular instructions to inform themselves, in the course of their tours, if any sisters of religious orders would consent to undertake the surveillance of female prisoners, and under what conditions.²⁶

The inspector general for prisons in the Lyons area, Charles Lucas, had been impressed by the work of the religious sisters who virtually ran the women's section of the "central", as well as by "the order, cleanliness and good spirit" within the refuge that they had opened for discharged female prisoners, the 'Solitude'.²⁷ On the basis of his report their Mother Superior, Anne Quinon, was asked if she would provide staff for the female sections of all the Centrals.²⁸ By 1877, according to Claude Langlois, the Marie Joseph sisters were in charge of sixty per cent of all women's prisons in France.²⁹ The wide use made by the state of this and similar female congregations illustrates clearly the new harmony of values which existed between the Church and the ruling élite regarding the problem of female delinquency. The state was willing to ensure that the women were cared for without brutality, but meant them none the less to live in a state of complete submission. Dr Homo remarked that "the triple presence of nuns in the prisons, the dispensaries [where girls were examined for syphilis] and the Refuges accustoms the prostitutes...to consider all three as part of the same universal prison (monde carcéral)", a circumstance which he felt must be prejudicial to the attempts to reform the girls.³⁰

The number of religious sisters in charge of Saint Lazare was comparatively small, yet writers of various periods (Grandpré, Richard, Guyot, du Camp, Bizard) agree that the sisters maintained order with apparent ease, although no male guards,

²⁶ Document entitled *La Congrégation des Sœurs de Marie-Joseph à la Maison d'Arrêt et de Correction de St-Lazare, au Dépôt près de la Préfecture de Police et aux prisons de Fresnes*, found in the Saint Lazare Dossier EB.91 in the archives of the Prefecture. This is much less rich than might have been hoped, but staff at the Prefecture said that a great deal of the prison archives had been destroyed during the Commune.

²⁷ Panici, Pr, *Avec les Femmes en Prison*, p.33. The nuns were then called the Saint Joseph sisters and affiliated to an order which did not specialise in prison work.

²⁸ In nineteenth century France prisons were either *maisons de détention* or *maisons centrales*. The former, of which every department had at least one, received prisoners sentenced by the local courts, which only dealt with offences carrying a maximum penalty of one or at most two years. The latter, of which there were only five at the time for the whole of France, received prisoners with heavier sentences, condemned by an Assize Court.

²⁹ Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, p.349. Les Sœurs de la Sagesse were another congregation which worked in French prisons during the nineteenth century.

³⁰Homo, *La prostitution*, etc., p.114

except one "brigadier", were allowed to enter the prison proper.

The control exerted by the nuns must have been due at least in part to the great psychological advantage that French culture gave them over the imprisoned women. They were all of legitimate birth and honourable family as conditions of their office, yet they endured the same lack of bodily comforts as their charges, indeed they rose even earlier, at 4 a.m., to attend a private mass. Like them they wore a uniform, maintained silence, worked during the same hours, were enclosed by the same walls and deprived of all opportunities for worldly pleasure. Yet there were great differences: the nuns were virgins and their work was not a punishment but a sacrifice, for even the money they earned was not theirs to spend. Here then was a repetition of the traditional treatment given the lower-class whore, shut up for her own and society's good in the charge of nuns whose virtue was unassailable.

The popular imagination found this proximity piquant. An illustration to a popular song in a minor key by Aristide Bruant, in which a street girl laments that her boyfriend will have no-one to support him while she does time in Saint Lazare, shows a fat and grim-faced nun leading the rebellious young woman away "to drink medicine" for three months. The artist has drawn the dress of the sisters and the imprisoned women incorrectly. As *Gil Blas* was an anticlerical journal, his picture of the nun is a caricature. In reality her gaoler might have been the girl's own age. Active religious orders looked for young postulants, who had many years of service to give. The sight of them in the old building, the former monastery, was like seeing an apparition, according to "Savioz",³¹ writing for the feminist newspaper, *La Fronde*, in September 1896; Maxime du Camp had said the same thing 27 years earlier. What might their effect have been upon the prisoners, many of whom had made their First Communion in childhood (as the girl in the song had done) and who

³¹ Pen-name of Mme G. Avril de Sainte Croix. She wrote this series of articles under the by-line *La Tribune*, for the benefit of "those who care about human suffering". She hoped that the facts concerning the interior organisation of Saint Lazare would cause a renewal of public effort against the system of imprisoning prostitutes and criminals in the same building. She wished to show that the prison was inhumane in its treatment of young girls and also that the lack of supervision at night was bound to have a bad influence on young offenders.

now found themselves in the notorious prison at which they probably arrived tired, undernourished, and probably sick? The contrast of dress - the convicts in ugly, loose garments (grey for the Second Section) and the nuns in the traditional robes of righteousness - must have had its effect, although on some of the women that effect was negative.

How did the nuns perceive the outcasts which it was their aim to train in morals and religion by the use of severity mingled with kindness?³² Savioz took more notice of the Marie Joseph Sisters than other writers. Although hostile to the Church, she took the trouble to ask the sister in charge of the Second Section about the behaviour of the inmates and found that, like others subjected to strong authoritarian rule, her informant had internalised the values of those above her. She was told that the prostitutes fell into two categories, the *soumises* - the registered girls - and the *insoumises*, the would-be independents, who had carried on their trade without police approval. Savioz commented:

Unnecessary to say that the first category, the poor creatures who have fallen so low that they are no longer conscious of their abjection, incapable of resistance or revolt, are the favourites of the...administration and of the nuns. The superior in charge of the general surveillance of the second section, when questioned by us, had nothing but praise for the registered girls, and in this woman, herself under the yoke of discipline for twenty years, to whom the habit of daily contact with the police and their *protégées* had given a very special idea of human dignity and the liberty of the individual, one could sense a hidden anger against the others, the *insoumises*, the girls who, despite successive terms of imprisonment, punishments, persecution...had not wished to bow their heads, to allow themselves to be rivetted to that shameful chain of slavery, which is what being registered at the prefecture of police means for a woman.

"The best prisoners, the most gentle natures", she said to us in her dreary voice, "are the house girls; they never answer back or disobey; they are reliable girls. Unfortunately, they are the ones we see the least of. All the same the others, the girls *en carte*, are also very nice; they have not lost all good feeling; *they know that one must put up with it.* [Savioz' italics.] And then they are more religious, they don't swear so much. Those who work in the better streets are sufficiently well-behaved. Only to look at them tells you the sort of clients they have. Whereas the others, the *insoumises*, are terrible and with them we are sometimes obliged to be severe...The young ones are particularly impossible; they have no self-control, show off their vicious

³² Aims mentioned in a report sent by the congregation to the Bishop of Limoges in 1879. Panici, *Avec les femmes*, p 40.

habits, talk indecently and when we wish to reprimand them, they reply with mocking smiles and insolent gestures. Still you must admit that those girls are not afraid of work. The registered girls...hardly do anything."³³

For this nun, the prostitute was defined only by her degree of submission. Those with "good feeling" knew that "one must put up with it". Those who showed a sense of the reality of their degradation were those to whom severity was shown. There does not seem to have been an appreciation of the value of a spirit of resistance and vitality, and perhaps there could not be, among a population of nun-warders, each of whom was bound to view every expression of one's own private will as a yielding to sin.

There were very great similarities between the regime inside the largest prison for women in France and that inside the convent refuges which are described later in this study. In both cases those in charge desired to effect the conversion of sexually experienced women into asexual beings whose chief virtue would be submission to a regime of order, silence, work and discipline. Whereas the state wanted the women to remain available to men, the nuns, with the inmates' salvation in mind, wished them to give up life in the world for ever. This was because they had no trust in the integrity of the girls, even when reformed. Like the lay authorities they believed that a fallen woman must be constantly supervised and could only be good when under control.

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The regulation system, though often attacked in the second half of the nineteenth century, survived well into the twentieth. Despite his sympathy for its victims, Parent Duchatelet, like the majority of his readers, never questioned the justice of the regulation system for a moment. The fact that the women had internalised the values of respectable society with regard to themselves only added

³³ Savioz, *La Fronde*, final article on Saint Lazare under the by-line "*La Tribune*", September 1896.

to his conviction of the justice of the controls to which they were subjected:

They have, as I have said elsewhere, the feeling of how low they have fallen; they know that they are in opposition with laws both human and divine, and that they find themselves, by the very fact of their employment, unable to claim those rights whose value they appreciate very well, but of which they have rendered themselves unworthy.

The doctor quoted Montesquieu's *Esprit des Loix* to reinforce his thesis - those who "violate public continence" should lose the advantages which society attaches to purity of life; they should be subject to fines, to shame, be compelled to hide themselves, be exposed to public infamy and forced to live on the margin of society.³⁴ In other words, Parent concluded that personal liberty is a right which a prostitute cannot claim. His religious training as a Jansenist, with its extreme distrust of the female body, would have confirmed for him the justice of the popular view.

But what of the men who consorted with prostitutes? Should they have full civil rights? As Alain Corbin says in the preface to his abbreviation of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, the client is "*le grand absent*" from this great work. Daring as Parent had been to undertake such a study, which had excited amazement and disgust among his colleagues and friends,³⁵ he was not unwise enough to match his investigations on the women with a corresponding survey of the origins, education, physical appearance, character, cleanliness and condition of the genitalia belonging to the men for whose benefit the guilty trade existed, nor to suggest that they too deserved to lose the protection of the law. Inside the world created by his study the females are prostitutes, madams or prison warders; males belong to the police or the medical profession. There are no clients. The girls are described with a great deal of sympathy; facts are presented which show that the average whore is not a

³⁴ Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Book XII, ch.iv.

³⁵ Parent died at forty-five after a brief illness, worn out by his unrelenting addiction to work, according to the *Notice Historique* at the commencement of his book, which was published posthumously. It is possible that the reaction of his circle to the kind of work that he was doing had added to his fatigue.

monster or a social mutant, but an ordinary woman, usually from the provinces, whose misfortune it was to be without money, friends or family in a big city where men were used to paying for sex. Parent certainly believed that love of inappropriate finery and a tendency to idleness were among the chief factors which drew girls to prostitution, but he also gave a high place to poverty and seduction by an absconding lover in his list of precipitating causes. As the study dealt only with the lower ranks of the prostitute population, he found that his subjects came almost invariably from the working classes. They left the trade, as far as the Paris police were aware, after about four years of work, and Parent assumed with some concern that society re-absorbed them, but could not prove this. It did not appear to have occurred to him that they may have gone to provincial brothels.

Parent's view of the trade in sex was the view of a man who was above all things public-spirited, who undertook his investigations into what were avoided subjects because he wished to assist society to live better, even amid its dirt, the dirt which its fleshly nature compelled it to create.³⁶

Prostitution is as inevitable, within a large population of men, as sewers, rubbish dumps and collections of objectionable refuse (*immondices*). The conduct of the authorities ought to be the same in regard to the one as with regard to the other; their duty is to supervise them, to attenuate by all possible means the inconveniences inherent in them, and to that end, to hide them, to relegate them to the most obscure corners, in a word to render their presence as unperceived as possible.³⁷

This train of thought brings Parent to the same conclusion as that of the theologians of the distant past, namely that prostitution regrettably has a place in the order of things, and indeed he joins them in his use of a well-known authority:

As for me, I answer the opponents of the toleration that the administration judges fit to use towards prostitutes with this passage from St Augustine: *Quid sordius, quid inanius...* (a full quotation follows in Latin of the

³⁶ This is not deny modern psychological insights into what might have been the subconscious reasons for Parent's choice of such things as slaughter-yards, sewers and brothels as objects of research; whatever they were, they do not invalidate the active benevolence of his private life nor the usefulness to society of his studies.

³⁷ Parent -Duchâtelet, Vol.II, p.339.

passage already cited on p.6 of the previous chapter: "Is there anything more sordid, more miserable, etc.) But St Augustine, before shutting himself up in the cloister, had known the world, and his vast genius allowed him to face the things of this earth as well as all that has to do with the most sublime truths of morality and religion.³⁸

Here is evidence indeed of the influence of religious culture on the treatment of prostitutes in France. One of the men at the forefront of the new studies in public hygiene, who was instrumental in the development and spread of the regulation system, found justification from a Father of the Church in assigning a section of the female population, which had been found willing to sell sex at least once, to a form of work which would keep it permanently contaminated with disease and mortal sin.

Alphonse Esquiros

Not every writer who saw prostitution as a social problem in nineteenth century France was as deeply influenced as Parent-Duchâtelet by the traditional prejudice against women. Three years after the appearance of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* Alphonse Esquiros published *Les Vierges Folles* (The Foolish Virgins).³⁹ He and Parent were the first original thinkers on the subject of prostitution to publish in France. Although Parent's book carried the greater weight, because it contained a collection of facts never known to any one person before him, yet Esquiros also reached a wide public. *Les Vierges Folles* was small, cheap and easy to read; it went into many editions and was still being published in 1873, at the time when anxiety over syphilis and the battle to abolish regulation were about to claim a share of public attention until the end of the century. It aroused strong protests from the Church in particular, because the author gave what was considered to be too sympathetic a picture of the prostitute, one which suggested her guilt to be less than her misfortunes.

³⁸ Parent-Duchâtelet, Vol.II, p.339..

³⁹ Published by A. le Gallois, Paris, 1840. Later he expanded this book by the inclusion of *Les Vierges Sages*, originally published separately in 1842. His sister Adèle apparently shared his interests, publishing her own work, *Les marchandes d'amour* in 1865.

Although Esquiros drew heavily on Parent's study, he gives a literary rather than a scientific presentation of his subject, which is really centered upon the condition of working class women. His image of the girls whom society rejects is that of essentially decent women, with a strong potential for good which is wasted by the various degrees of prostitution into which they are forced by their difficult circumstances. While believing that woman is naturally frail and given to love of display, Esquiros was also passionately convinced that the economic order was unfavourable to those of the the working class, particularly those without the support of a family. The author opposes the traditional view that prostitution is necessary to mankind; he places the responsibility for the trade in sex on men alone. "In any case, according to us, the real cause of prostitution is neither poverty, idleness, ignorance nor incapacity, nor love: it is men."⁴⁰ If there were no men to buy, there would be no more women selling. Likewise, if the whore were dishonest, if she hated men, it is only because she recognised in them the "authors of her degradation". She should not be blamed, in fact reproach and abuse will only cause her despair to harden into effrontery. He presents the prostitute as essentially disadvantaged, unable to make a living except through the most poorly paid of women's work, usually without family protection and condemned as idle if she grew restive under long hours of sedentary and boring labour. A book such as this called for pity for the prostitute, and absolved her from almost all blame.

Despite his humanity, Esquiros was what many Frenchmen became later in the century, a neo-regulationist. He did not wish to see the prostitute released from police supervision or health checks, rather that the state should ensure that the brothel girl was given a fair deal by the madam, and that her medical examination should be conducted in her own room, not at the public dispensary, and with all possible respect for her feelings for, as Parent had found, a whore has modesty, like other women. *Les Vièrges Folles* reinforced what Parent had said three years

⁴⁰ Esquiros, p.126.

earlier, that a prostitute is usually just an ordinary working class girl whom circumstances have combined to push into an unpleasant trade. Of course she will leave if she can find anything better. Parent was content to believe that the average girl did leave after approximately four years, in order to re-enter society. His evidence was that the police records showed no further trace of her, yet he had only studied the Paris files. Esquiros did not draw such hopeful conclusions from such fragmentary evidence. He was convinced that after a few years the girl's health and, even more important, her sense of herself, were permanently damaged. Therefore it was unlikely that she could slip back into society very easily, unless she could buy her way into some respectable position. The research done by Frances Finnegan into prostitution in York during the nineteenth century tends to support the conclusions of Esquiros. She found that far from being able to leave the trade, the women's frequent attempts to do so were usually unsuccessful.⁴¹ Esquiros did not make any dogmatic statements, but he suggested that the lower-class prostitute tended to descend the social scale of her world the longer she remained in it. Rehabilitation was not inevitable, but sickness was, and death was not far away.⁴² Without realising it, Esquiros in this view comes close to agreeing with that of the nuns who operated convent refuges, namely that their penitents, if allowed to leave, would fall straight back into mortal sin.

In his preface to the 1873 edition Esquiros noted that public taste had changed; the brothels had diminished in number and the *isolées*, whom he had earlier called the aristocrats of prostitution, now dominated the field to an extent which had not seemed possible in 1840. Alain Corbin believes that this phenomenon was basically caused by an evolution in sexual taste: the average man, even when poor, wished to think of himself as the lover, or seducer, of an attractive

⁴¹ Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: a study of Victorian prostitutes in York*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1979. Finnegan was not concerned to deny Parent-Duchâtelet's findings, but those of Dr. Wm. Acton, a nineteenth century disciple of his.

⁴² The only practical solution that occurred to Esquiros is that of sending French prostitutes to Australia, as that country had managed to turn British prostitutes into useful citizens.

woman, not as the purchaser of a female for sexual satisfaction.⁴³ This evolution was marked by the sympathetic treatment given to the image of the whore in popular song. Aristide Bruant, a well-known Parisian music-hall performer and song writer, was among the first to celebrate the street-walker as a woman who could both feel and inspire love. The old-fashioned brothel began to be seen as a blot on the neighbourhood, although formerly it had been welcomed by local shopkeepers for the increased trade it brought. Yet to the contemporary social observer, the flagrant presence of prostitution on the streets and the cult of the expensive *grande cocotte* which was such a feature of French society during the Second Empire, seemed a sign of the degeneration of the nation. No longer was prostitution hidden, ashamed of itself, but "triumphant debauchery everywhere raises its head. Who would dare to maintain that this corruption of the last reign has had nothing to do with our defeat? [In the Franco-Prussian War.]"⁴⁴ Many agreed. The flowering of compassion and understanding which had begun in 1836 with the publication of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* did not fall fruitless, but what it produced was not social reform, only an attempt to make regulation less unjust. Together with this, perhaps influencing it, was the fact that from 1838 until the end of the century the figure of the prostitute interested some of the best and most popular writers in France. Their final conclusions were pessimistic, like those of the Church which most of them had consciously rejected, but whose teachings had permeated their culture.

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Sue, Balzac, Dumas the Younger, Hugo: The prostitute as heroine

In the middle decades of the last century Eugène Sue, a neglected writer today, was at the height of his fame and popularity in France. In 1842 his book, *Les*

⁴³ Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce*, p.175.

⁴⁴ Esquiros, p.3 of 1873 edition.

Mystères de Paris, had just been serialized by the *Journal des Débats* and was to be carried in translation to Europe and overseas. In the introduction to the 1873 edition of *Les Vièrges Folles*, Esquiros said of it:

Les Vièrges Folles had been published for some time when a novelist, a man of imagination and talent, had the happy idea of bringing to life in a book the dramatic sufferings of that shadowy class which lives outside society. An immense success greeted this work of imagination, which was at the same time an act of courage. Whatever one may say, it is worth while to read the *Mystères de Paris*; to raise the veil which covers our social sores is to apply the remedy which must cure them.

The earlier novels of Sue had been romances set in high society, but as a result of personal rejection by the aristocratic circle which had at first welcomed him as an equal, the middle-class author turned his attention to the other end of the social scale, deciding to reveal the Paris of the poor, the destitute and the criminal. Under the influence of his material and the contacts that his growing reputation brought him, he gradually developed from a picturesque writer to one whose work, like that of Dickens, was meant to contain real social comment.⁴⁵ The idea of the romantic novel as a vehicle for this was scarcely exploited in France when he began to write, but the public was ready for it. The *Mystères* appeared during a time of great concern over social conditions, when enquiries were being conducted into the lives of the poor partly as a result of the great increase in pauperism and crime in all large centres of population.

The heroine of the novel is a young prostitute nicknamed Fleur-de-Marie. Brought up as a foundling, discharged on to the streets at fourteen, arrested for being a vagabond then drifting helplessly into prostitution, her experience exemplifies the unjust social conditions endured by the least privileged of her country and time. Unlike the reader, the book's heroine does not know that she is the lost child of a princely house. Although Fleur-de-Marie is reunited with her

⁴⁵ This view of his work is supported by Louis Chevalier in the first part of Ch. I of *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Plon, Paris, 1958.

noble family she is tormented by her conscience, and eventually gives up the life of privilege. In order to expiate not her sins, surely, but her very existence, the former prostitute retires to a convent just outside her father's estate, and rapidly wastes away. The reader is presented with this as a satisfying end to a hopelessly flawed existence. In his treatment of this theme Sue satisfied the prejudices of his readers against the penetration of the respectable classes by those without reputation, and endorsed the usefulness of the convent as a place where the disgraced girl might find a kind of peace.

Honoré de Balzac

Two years after the publication of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* Honoré de Balzac began to write *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. It contains the fullest development of the character of a prostitute within Balzac's great *Comédie Humaine*, the series of books in which he portrayed the variety of human nature in the France of his own day. The heroine, Esther, is a *grande cocotte* who, in order to please her lover, agrees to spend some time in a convent to purge herself of the stains of her past. Balzac, who had read Parent-Duchatelet, reproduced some of the doctor's findings in the account of Esther's reaction to the disciplined life she found there. In his study of the Parisian convent refuge of the Bon Pasteur, Parent had reported that the abrupt change of regime and company appeared to produce in the girls a loss of energy and subsequent depression, which left them very susceptible to tuberculosis. Esther experiences the same deterioration; her health is brought dangerously low as she tries to lose herself in religion to make up for a life which, since childhood, had been spent in debauchery. In the end she gives up and returns to her lover, who accepts that the change required was beyond her strength.

Although Balzac acknowledges that the heroine is capable of unselfish love, his cynical appraisal of her type permeates the text. It is sometimes expressed through the characters of the other women in the story who also practise the trade, sometimes explicitly:

Prostitutes are essentially unstable creatures, who pass without reflection from the most unreasoning suspicion to absolute trust. They are, in this respect, lower than the animals. Extreme in everything, in their joy, in their despair, in their religion, in their irreligion, almost all of them would go mad if their particular susceptibility to death did not decimate them, and if a random good luck did not raise some of them from the mire in which they live.⁴⁶

Splendeurs suggests that the prostitute is irreversibly damaged by an overstimulated sexuality. Balzac shows them either morally corrupted by their life, or if not, pointed towards an early death by a burning desire for love, a desire which will never be fully satisfied and which will demand from them one exhausting emotional sacrifice after another. There is no tolerable future for such people: Esther is betrayed by her lover and commits suicide. In his image of the prostitute, Balzac clearly states that her needs are not those that religion can satisfy, but his portrayal of her whole class suggests that in accordance with the moral theology underlying his culture's ideas of good and evil, its members have been irremediably damaged by their sexual experience.

Alexandre Dumas (the Younger)

The most perfect expression of what might be called the pseudo-Christian or destructively romantic view of the prostitute is of course, *La dame aux camélias* published by Alexander Dumas the Younger in 1848. True to the genre, the heroine is young and very beautiful; she is also a type of the golden-hearted prostitute who gives too much. She sacrifices her position in the *demi-monde* in order to devote herself to her lover, Armand. Later, being persuaded by his father that her own happiness is not worth so much in the sight of God as his family's reputation, she returns to her profession so as to drive the jealous young bourgeois lover back to respectability. The sacrifice breaks her heart and health together.

Writing in 1868 in the preface to an edition of his plays, Dumas said with

⁴⁶ H. de Balzac, *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*, ed. Gallimard, p.458.

regard to *La dame aux camélias* that the bourgeois woman was to blame for the double standard of morality which decreed that the harlot should be an outcast and the marriageable virgin a spotless lily, although both sold themselves to men. The self-righteous argument of this well-known fornicator is unconvincing as it is obvious that his highly successful work was in full agreement with the double standard which destroys Marguerite. Had the author chosen to show the woman rebellious or resentful in the episode with Armand's father, he might have made a thrilling and unique protest against accepted pseudo-Christian morality, but he did not so choose. Instead he affirmed the moral rightness of the old man's demand by suggesting that the fallen women's consequent suffering brought her back to God. The death scene, particularly in the play, brings this out clearly. Marguerite says to Armand:

...If I were holy, if my heart were truly chaste, perhaps I should weep at the idea of leaving a world in which you still remain, because the future would be full of promise, for which my whole past would give me the right to hope. Dying, all that will remain to you of me will be pure; living, my love would never be entirely free from stain...Believe me. God knows best...

The values of *La Dame aux Camélias* are positively against the teaching of the Church except in the powerful conclusion, when Dumas' image of the prostitute who sacrifices all her happiness for another, without earthly reward, yet confident of heaven, reinforces the spirituality common to the convent refuges, namely that salvation is the great need of society's victims, not social justice or a new start.

Victor Hugo

The greatest master of nineteenth century French social romanticism did not disdain the prostitute as heroine, although he gave her only a limited part to play. The principal character of *Les Misérables* (1862) is of course Jean Valjean, but the girl Fantine has a major role in the first third of Volume I. The episode concerning her is a powerful example of pathos in nineteenth century literature, basically confirming the judgments on fallen woman made in the work of the writers already

cited. In all of them the prostitute, always a woman born in the lower classes, is presented with a sympathy unknown to the previous century, yet it is difficult to say how much the new treatment is in advance of the old. Certainly it was considerably more humane than de Sade's cold appraisal of the public woman as a machine for pleasure or Restif de La Bretonne's more generous view of her as a necessary public servant whose position entitled her to protection from the state. In the nineteenth century the reading public was told what the very poor had always known, that prostitution was more likely to be the result of wretched social conditions than the result of idleness and lust. The internalisation of Christianity's rejection of sexual love is shown differently by the great nineteenth-century French authors' treatment of the public woman. They were the first in Europe to affirm that she was often more sinned against than sinning; they were equally certain that she was intolerable except on the edge of society, and even there, not for long. Most describe prostitutes who are still young and beautiful, and who might well deserve acceptance by society because of their innate goodness, but the authors do not allow this to happen: their final images of the "good" prostitute always show her repentant on an early deathbed.

The Goncourts, Huysmans, Zola and Maupassant: the heroine as a whore

The naturalist school, which superseded the romantics in the avant-garde of letters, (although Balzac may be called the first of them) took the attempt to portray reality an important stage further by its ability to interest the public in the woman who had *not* retained a loving heart while trafficking in her body. By doing so however they made the condition of the prostitute appear even less amenable to benevolent change.

"*L'école naturaliste*" received its name on the 16th April, 1877, at Trapp's restaurant, in Paris, during a dinner at which Edmond de Goncourt, Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert and a number of younger writers were present. Before that

"inaugural" dinner Edmond and his brother Jules, although now considered to be relatively minor authors, had exerted a profound influence on the literature of their day. In their preface to *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864) they wrote the following:

At the present time, when the novel is widening and increasing; when it is beginning to be the great, serious, impassioned, living form of literary study and social inquiry; when, through analysis and psychological investigation, it is becoming moral, contemporary History - when the novel has undertaken the studies and duties of science, it is able to claim the liberties and immunities of the latter.⁴⁷

By the end of the seventies Jules de Goncourt was dead and his brother had decided to distance himself from a movement which henceforward took its lead from Zola. The latter published *l'Assommoir* in 1877, a masterpiece which confirmed him as the man to whom the school would look for the development of its doctrine.⁴⁸ First of all in Paris, and then later at his home in Médan, Zola received a group of writers in love with honesty and modernity in literature. They were impatient of the romanticism which had dominated their art for most of the century. The most noteworthy of this group, apart from Zola himself, were Paul Alexis, Léon Hennique and three public servants, Henri Céard, Joris-Karl Huysmans and Guy de Maupassant.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ E. and J. de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, 1864, preface. English translation from the edition published by Vizetelly in 1887. Edmond used a part of this preface in that which he wrote for *La Fille Elisa*, in 1877.

⁴⁸ The word "naturalism" was borrowed from the vocabulary of science, philosophy and the graphic arts, being most generally used in reference to the latter. A naturalist painter was one who placed the imitation of nature as the highest goal in art; concordantly, the naturalist philosopher attributed the highest significance to what might be learned from the natural world. In literary criticism, a writer belonging to this school was supposed to study social data with the care and precision with which a naturalist would study zoological phenomena. Already in 1848 Baudelaire had hailed Balzac as "a savant...an observer...a naturalist." Incidentally Baudelaire himself, whose poetry was both inspired and permeated by his sexual experience, was unable to present them to a wide public because his poems were banned as obscene. His treatment of the prostitute as heroine was a subjective one which I do not consider relevant to this chapter, although he is one of my favourite poets.

⁴⁹ The group broke with Zola after the appearance of *La Terre* (1887), in which he had shifted from realism to indecency, as they saw it. This was virtually the end of the naturalist school.

Joris-Karl Huysmans

Huysmans published *Marthe*, the first of the naturalist novels dealing with prostitution in September, 1876, six months before Edmond de Goncourt's *La Fille Elisa*. He had rejected Christianity and like many of the Médan group, he had been deeply influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy. He saw the world, of which Paris was both megalopolis and microcosm, as a great bourgeois inferno peopled by pimps, prostitutes, perverts and sundry other debased forms of humanity, the whole pervaded by disease, especially syphilis. Marthe, the prostitute, although presented as an unlucky girl, pressured by poverty into her life of vice, does not retain an innocent heart but gradually becomes a creature of lust and destructiveness. She is a victim who ends by being morally ruined, irredeemably so. Like Balzac's heroine she leaves the brothel for the sake of a lover, but unlike Esther cannot keep away for long:

Like all the unfortunate creatures whom misery and casual employment have dragged through the dens of prostitution in a large city, she now experienced, despite herself, despite the horrible disgust which had assailed her upon first acquaintance with the life she had left, that strange regret, that terrible malady which leads every woman who has once led such a life to come back and plunge into it again, one day or another.⁵⁰

At the conclusion Marthe's lover leaves her in disgust, but admits that she had one redeeming quality:

And as for Marthe, since you speak of her again at the end of your letter, I pardon her all her villainies and all her treasons. Prostitutes like her have this much good in them, they lead us to love those who are not like them; they serve to drive us back to decency.

Consciously or not, Huysmans is doing no more than echo St Augustine here. His writing on sexuality, expressed in *Marthe* (prostitution), *En Ménage* (marriage) and *A vau l'eau* (celibacy) re-affirms his conviction that "man's life oscillates like a

⁵⁰ From the English translation by Samuel Putnam.

pendulum between pain and boredom." Towards the end of his life he experienced a re-conversion to catholicism, and his work thereafter expressed his belief in the value of physical pain offered in reparation for one's own sins, or those of others.

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt

The Goncourt brothers, as mentioned above, were an important source of ideas and style for the greater men of the naturalist school. They were consciously misogynist, making sexual relationships only with prostitutes or working-class mistresses, yet they wrote almost exclusively about the lives of individual women, each book representing a different type, or "case".

La fille Elisa was the fifth in this series, finished by Edmond alone, although the brothers had collaborated over the plan for it several years before Huysmans wrote *Marthe*. It was published in 1877. Written in part to combat the romantic treatment of the subject by Hugo and Dumas, the narrative contains passages of striking realism which expose the mean degradation of the harlot's life, yet without the tone of disgust and impatience which permeates Huysman's novel. Unfortunately Elisa's character never develops any depth, so that the book is a failure as a novel, although the realism of its account of life inside a brothel was and remains rare in Western fiction. The politician and abolitionist Yves Guyot praised it in this regard as "alive and exact".⁵¹

Goncourt's skill lay in observation; he did not concern himself with remedies. There is no suggestion in *La Fille Elisa* that the author expected any change of conditions in the brothel, or in the habits of the men who made use of it. The book's total effect is sombre.

Emile Zola

Emile Zola, at first a friend and disciple of Edmond de Goncourt, so far

⁵¹ Yves Guyot, *La Prostitution*, G. Charpentier, Paris, 1882, p.203.

surpassed him in the naturalist genre that one forgets that he did not begin it. Like Balzac he too devoted a novel to the life of a single prostitute as part of a greater series. *Nana* was the tenth book of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, in which Zola demonstrated the sickness of contemporary French society at many levels.

Very early in his adult life in Paris, when he was still a practising Catholic and very poor, Zola had become the lover of a prostitute who lived in the same building as himself, and had done so believing that he could reform and return her to respectable life. Her rejection of his attempt struck him forcibly as a betrayal. It is probable that this experience had something to do with his creation of a prostitute irredeemably devoted to her lucrative trade. His early exposure to religion may have helped to develop his concept of *Nana* as "the golden fly" who feeds on society's excrement. She too suffers an early death, but its description is not pathetic, but horrific.

Zola's whore is a striking image of a dangerous and corrupt woman, spoiled by the degeneration that had developed among the neglected lower classes as much as by any moral choice of her own.⁵² She is physically strong and utterly unreachable by moral considerations. Her one experience of heterosexual love turns out badly; it only hardens her. She represents the threat implied by the existence of the common people, badly treated, uneducated and vengeful. Her betters deserve the fate they receive at her hands, because they do not resist the lure of the animal in her. Such a view of the prostitute suggests the need for social intervention, for strict repression of vice as a defence of society, but it does not present the individual woman as capable of change or even worthy of help. Rather she is a creature determined by her environment and base human nature. In this presentation Zola shows no mercy towards his heroine, but his equivalence of sexuality with lust is in accordance with Christian tradition.

⁵² This reflected the theories of Lombroso who published his book, *Criminal Man*, in 1875.

Guy de Maupassant

Like every one of the writers whose work has already been commented on above, Maupassant had rejected the values of the Church. But he surpassed them all in the reputation he gained of being the most given to debauchery, earning the nickname "*le taureau triste*" (the sad bull). The sexual pleasure which he used to distract him from his fear of hereditary insanity indeed may have saved him from it by providing the cause of his premature death.⁵³

In his boyhood he was befriended by Gustave Flaubert, whose bitter pessimism probably influenced the younger man to adopt the world-view of Schopenhauer, the naturalist philosopher whom he subsequently called "the greatest spoiler of dreams who has ever walked on earth".⁵⁴ There is very little in Maupassant's writing concerning prostitution which suggests that the women or their condition are capable of being altered for the better.

At twenty he had been introduced by Flaubert to the circle that had formed around Edmond de Goncourt. Of all nineteenth-century French writers who took the prostitute as a subject, it was he who combined with the lightest touch, realism of observation and tragic irony in a series of short stories in which one or more prostitutes have a major role. The first two, *Boule de Suif* and *La Maison Tellier*, are among the finest examples of his work. They were published by the periodical *Les Soirées de Médan* in 1880 and 1881 respectively. In both of them Maupassant illustrated the decadence and hypocrisy of contemporary French society through an encounter between the bourgeoisie and the prostitute. These stories made a deep impression on the public and were regarded as subversive. In them, as in the rest of Maupassant's writing, sexual relationships are made to demonstrate the wretched condition of human nature, which arouses amusement, pity or contempt, but never hope. The author does not single out the public woman as a particular example of

⁵³ The writer had a younger brother whom he had to commit to an asylum, where he died insane. Maupassant himself died of syphilis at the age of 43.

⁵⁴ In his story, *Aupres d'un mort*, 1883.

the corrupting nature of lust: he suggests that her clients are equally rotten, or in other words that sexual desire involves spiritual degeneration, a statement that unites him closely to the religious base of his culture.

The feminists - the prostitute as an anachronism

The developments in French literature mirrored in the works mentioned above were only one manifestation of the leaven of new ideas which worked through the collective intelligence of French society in the nineteenth century. With Catholicism weakened by active persecution and then by its own internal power struggles, expressed in the conflict between gallican and ultramontane interests, and with the realisation that neither revolution nor the empire had been able to bring about a new age of justice, many of those with a social conscience and the gift of faith turned to the theories of Saint-Simon and Fourier. Although now termed "utopian" in a pejorative sense, their systems of social reform were profoundly influential, and truly original in that they recognised woman as the equal of man and gave her an important place in the regeneration of society. Many women who later became active feminists did so after a previous commitment to the doctrines of the utopian thinkers.⁵⁵ To them, although the prostitute was not seen as personally more wicked than the rest of her sex, her trade was not acknowledged as a valid expression of the human experience. Her image represented a stage in the evolution of society towards justice and harmony. Apart from the few who joined the campaign to abolish the regulation system, French feminists of the nineteenth century devoted their energies then and later to an attempt to obtain for women equal education, economic independence and the right to divorce.⁵⁶ An outstanding

⁵⁵ For example Suzanne Voilquin, Elisa Lemonnier, Pauline Roland, Jeanne Deroin, Maria Desraismes and Flora Tristan, to mention only some of the most prominent.

⁵⁶ In parenthesis it should be noted here that an alternative to the conventual system of incarceration and reform of disgraced women, *l'Oeuvre des Libérées de Saint Lazare*, appeared in Paris in 1869 and was operated by conservative, mainly Protestant feminists led by Pauline de Grandpré. It provided financial help and short-term accommodation to women newly released from prison, who had nowhere to go. It had great difficulty finding support, although it excluded all registered prostitutes from its benefits. A similar enterprise, openly offering shelter to known public women, was opened by Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix in 1901. It too found that public interest was slight. Both

feminist of the centre left declared:

Whatever her capacities, a woman born poor is definitely poor for the rest of her days, because she will never occupy any but the lowest rungs on the ladder of work; the higher rungs are forbidden her. Her resource is to find a husband. If no husband appears, then she has to fall back on to finding a lover.

Some women find it simpler to begin by doing the latter.

Indeed the foolish virgin's folly is premeditated, calculated, and it is society which is the most foolish, for by its unjust system of sharing it reduces half of humanity to seeking from debauchery the bread and independence denied it by the law.

The only way to combat this *hétairisme* is to emancipate women...⁵⁷

That was the opinion of Maria Deraismes, a middle class unmarried woman in comfortable circumstances. It resembled the conclusions of someone very different, Paule Minck, a working-class socialist and the friend of Louise Michel, who did not become interested in feminism as such until the latter half of her life. Her image of the prostitute was compounded with that of the average woman, too yielding, too traditional, too religious, too interested in sex, which Minck, although opposed to the Church, yet typically associated with dirt. But educate this weak creature, she thought, give her equal pay (but not the vote) and none will want to become prostitutes:

Relieve woman from the compelling yoke beneath which she is bowed down and you will become strong and the race will be regenerated.

Do you not see that in vilifying her you belittle yourselves, and that...she drags you down with her and sometimes plunges you into a sewer full of disease and impurity? Give her liberty...slavery breaks the spirit, engenders cowardice, base actions, produces vice, corruption and as a final consequence moral laxity, bastardy, the degeneration of the race. What is needed is the creation of teacher training colleges and high schools for women, from which young girls will emerge with a solid education,...armed for the battle - both physical and moral - which they will have to face.⁵⁸

Grandpré and Avril de Sainte Croix spent much of their energies in campaigns for the abolition of the regulation system, the white slave trade and the double moral standard.

⁵⁷ Extract from *l'Hétairisme*, an article by Maria Deraismes in *Le Droit des Femmes* of 11 September 1869.

⁵⁸ From her speech "*Le travail de la femme*" given in Paris on 13 July 1868 and reproduced in

For French feminists the image of the prostitute had to be that of an exploited or degenerate female: to see her as anything more was to open up areas of conjecture which they were not equipped to explore.

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By the end of the nineteenth century, despite the attention given to her type by social thinkers and some of the masters of its literature, French society had not been able to create any programme to deal with those women who picked their living from "the mud and filth of violent desire", apart from an improvement in the conditions under which their trade was regulated by the police.

The existence of Saint Lazare continued unchanged, right through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, despite agitation for abolition of the regulation system. If, then, worldly society in nineteenth century France had nothing positive to offer the prostitute except money for her services, a certain amount of primitive medical care when she contracted syphilis, and an intermittent literary sympathy, were those who stayed faithful to religion able to do better? Within a nation where debate on the role of women was among the most enlightened in the world, what fresh interpretation of the Gospels gave hope to the doubly disgraced daughters of Eve? There was none. The leaders of the Church did not oppose the regulation system, nor call for repressive measures to be applied to the prostitute's clients, whose demands were the life of the trade in sex. Those who tried to bridge the gap between workers and owners in the name of social catholicism, did not encourage society to take its share of blame for conditions of labour which made much of women's work in any trade outside prostitution miserably paid. Was there no concrete expression of Christian concern? Even without direct encouragement from their leaders, did any of the rank and file find a way to show the prostitute that in the revived French Church there was a place for

Paule Minck, communarde et féministe, 1839-1901, edited by Alain Dalotel, Editions Syros, Paris, 1968, pp.136,137.

her as well as other sinners? The focus of this essay now contracts from the general to the particular, in order to answer that question at length, in the following chapters.

PART TWO: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY REFUGE



Chapter III - Four Founding Mothers

Not only was the nineteenth century a time of great political and intellectual activity in France, it also saw a revival of life and action in the religious sphere. Did the renewed faith in the power of Catholicism to give meaning to existence extend to sexually disgraced women? The Church certainly did not exclude them from the promises of the Gospel, yet among the many Frenchwomen of will and intellect who left their families to join a religious community, there were only a few who took the salvation of the "madeleine" as their particular task. It was not a popular cause: out of 175 female generalates in nineteenth-century France, Claude Langlois only found one with over 100 nuns devoted exclusively to sexually disgraced women.¹ To this must be added the congregation of N.D. de Charité du Bon Pasteur, which although not formally constituted as a generalate, was the equivalent of one in numbers. In 1880 Emile Keller published a list of religious congregations of all sizes engaged in active charitable works. On examination it appears that out of 721 female communities there were nine which were founded to take in sexually disgraced women and girls and another nine who took in a few as part of their general work.² It seems clear from this that work among "impure" females was either repugnant to most religious communities because of a perceived danger of moral contagion, or else attracted very few charitable donations in its vulnerable initial stages, and therefore succumbed before the group had learned to earn its own living.

Yet there were some women who chose to provide an asylum for the repentant prostitute, or the sexually disgraced, rejected girl. What were they like and how did they cope with the unpopularity of their kind of Christian work? What motivated them and

¹C. Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1984, p.268 and index.

²E. Keller, *Les Congrégations religieuses*, Paris, 1880. Included in the first group of nine I have placed the Bon Pasteur d'Angers and N.D. de Charité du Refuge.

were they able to introduce new remedial methods of dealing with disgraced women and girls in the congregations over which they had control?

This chapter attempts to give an answer by presenting the lives of four of the founding mothers of the rare congregations in question. The work that they did, although in Christian parlance it excluded the world, allowed them to become totally involved in the lives of many other women, albeit within a tightly controlled environment. Because of this environment, every attempt made subsequently to explain them to the public has been monitored, so as to maintain the image of their sanctity, whether or not it has been officially recognised. Yet, if only this image did not still imply a life unbelievably free from fault or weakness! The various communities who still cherish their memory do not permit free access to their archives, unless the researcher intends to use them to the greater glory of the community.

This attitude is particularly marked in the case of the order of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, which chose to mark the sesquicentennial of the generalate in 1985 by re-issuing a hagiography of St Marie Euphrasie Pelletier by Gabriel Powers, entirely in the tradition of similar works of the last century. Such a heavily biased account cannot do the foundress justice because it does not describe a real woman. A life of Thérèse Rondeau, published in 1981 by the abbe Bru on behalf of Notre Dame de Miséricorde de Laval, attempts to present an objective treatment, but without much success, and is in any case too brief to develop its subject in any depth.

The abbé Roger Guitraud, now deceased, a former chaplain to a subsidiary of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux, wrote a scholarly account of the life of its foundress in 1966. Intended only for private circulation among the small community, it was still very carefully prepared. If it, too, errs on the side of hagiography, it does so because its author found himself in sympathy with the self-doubting yet generous character of his heroine. He is a partisan rather than a flatterer.

The life of Thérèse Chupin by Fr Mortier, published in 1926 attempts with

awkwardness to present a self-directed, unusual foundress as the perfectly resigned Dominican nun. The paucity of material and its special nature make it difficult to decide how much to tell of these four women, so that one might ask: why write of them at all? Because this essay's underlying theme is the effect of Catholic theology on the attitude towards prostitution in nineteenth-century France, shown in its extreme form within the convent refuges. Because the refuges were supposed to provide the Christian solution to the problems inherent in female sexual experience outside marriage, problems which, in part, a Christian culture had created. Yet as none of the penitents appears to have left a written record of her experiences inside a refuge, and as none of the congregations examined allows free access to letters or journals written by the nuns, the only way of knowing anything of the interior spiritual atmosphere of such places is through their public documents, which are the lives of their principal women, the foundresses.

They are presented as models of charity and suffering, which suggests something of how the sufferings of those under their authority would have been seen. Some of the disgraced girls' keenest pangs, the longing for alcohol, for sexual love, for uninhibited talk and play, would, in the light of these model women's lives, have appeared ugly evidences of a corrupt nature. Melancholy however, depression, suicidal leanings and the desire to punish oneself would, by the same light, appear to be manifestations of contrition and evidence of supernatural grace.

All were born into areas characterised by loyalty to crown and Church, a loyalty which had made religious martyrs of some within their own memory or that of their parents. Although the work they did was an expression of reactionary tendencies within French catholicism, it was done in an atmosphere of religious revival, with a spiritual excitement that saw through the veil of material circumstances a vision of society being fought over by God and the devil, represented by the pope and the forces which had made the revolution.

In social status they were divided: Lamourous was born into the *noblesse de robe*,

a class with which Pelletier's parents were linked by marriage, although they belonged to the professional bourgeoisie. Both women received a private education and were used to the privilege of having the personal attention of a director of conscience, so that their entry into the cloistered life was not seen as out of place by the clergy.

Although Chupin and Rondeau were literate, they had to earn their living among the working classes, the former as a prison warder and the latter as proprietor of an ironing business. Their commitment to celibacy and desire to work for the Church gave them a certain upward mobility, which was at times bitterly disputed by those ecclesiastics from whom they expected support.

Rose Virginie Pelletier (13 July 1796 to 24 April 1868) Foundress of the congregation of Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers in 1829. Canonised as Ste Marie de Ste Euphrasie Pelletier in 1940.

She was one of the most remarkable women of our time. She had a far-seeing and powerful intellect, joined to a great heart. She could have ruled an empire.³

The life of Rose Virginie Pelletier has been written several times, but unfortunately always as hagiography.⁴ Certainly her achievement deserves admiration, even wonder, but until her congregation is ready to allow free access to its archives by an objective biographer nothing historically satisfying will be written about her. It is therefore disappointing from this point of view that the most recent life of St Marie Euphrasie (as she is commonly known) is a re-edition of *Redemption*, by Gabriel Powers, a work thoroughly in the old tradition of nineteenth-century romantic catholicism, although it was published first in 1940. As Claude Langlois wrote in another context, in trying to present a valid history of what are seen by some as sacred matters, the aim should be, not to deny divine initiative, but to see the facts clearly.

To see Pelletier clearly, it would be necessary to know why, of all the revived female congregations that an intelligent, devout young woman could have entered in

³ Father Le Boucher, chaplain to the Mother House of Notre Dame du Bon Pasteur d'Angers, speaking after Mother Euphrasie's death in 1868. Bernonville, *Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier*, p. 138.

⁴ *Mirror of the Virtues of Mr Mary of Saint Euphrasia Pelletier*, London, 1888.

Portais, Canon, *La Servante de Dieu, Marie de Sainte Euphrasie Pelletier, Fondatrice de la Congrégation de Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers; sa vie, son oeuvre, ses vertus*. 2 vols, 1893.

Gabriel Francis Powers, *Redemption; the life of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier*, Manila, 1940. Reissued to mark the sesquicentennial of the Generalate by the Religious of the Good Shepherd, Philippine Province, 1986.

Gaetan Bernonville, *Une apôtre de l'enfance délaissée*, Paris, 1950.

Marie-Dominique Poinset, *Rien n'est impossible à l'amour: Rose-Virginie Pelletier, Mere Marie de Sainte-Euphrasie*, Paris, 1968.

Jacinta Morrison, (trans) *St Mary Euphrasia, Spirit and Charism*, trans. from *Regards neufs sur Sainte Marie Euphrasie*, (anonymous) New York, 1979.

Auguste Sandreau, Mgr, *Graces et Fidélités*, English trans. *The Secret of the Sanctity of St. Mary Euphrasia*, 3 vols, undated.

Marie-Anne Cloarec, Sr, (ed) *Letters of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, 1798-1868*, published to mark the sesquicentennial of the Generalate 1835-1985, Bar-le-Duc, 1984.

Restoration France, she chose the White Sisters of the revived Eudist congregation of Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge. A lonely girl, born on the isle of Noirmoutier, off the coast of the Vendée, into a medical doctor's family, she was sent in early childhood to a convent school by her widowed mother, who afterwards never visited nor invited her daughter home. When school was over for good, it is understandable that the girl, with little experience of family life, or of any life in the world, should wish to become a nun. But why enter a small institution dealing with disgraced women? Was it because she expected to feel at home among the rejected? Or was it done to disoblige her family? She could have pleased them by entering the Ursuline community or the new and successful teaching congregation of the Sacred Heart, lead by Sophie Barat. Perhaps she sensed her power; a desire to rise quickly through the hierarchy may have kept her away from more vigorous, well organized groups because she wished to have a free hand when her time had come. Little did the elderly White Sisters know what a dynamic agent of change they were welcoming into their neglected house. The congregations of the other foundresses in this study are now almost extinct, the work they used to do is being done by employees of the state. Mother Pelletier's Good Shepherd Sisters still number over seven thousand, operating in provinces all over the world, giving care to girls and women in various states of need, following the most positive aspects of her teaching and that of St John Eudes, together with some of the insights of the modern belief systems of sociology and psychology.

Once Pelletier reached the position of superior in 1825, her personality and leadership made a strong impression on the congregation at Tours as well as on clergy and well-wishers outside the cloister. Postulants and penitents arrived in numbers greater than the older sisters had ever seen. Not only this, but the mother superior founded two new sections within the refuge. One was for a group called "the Magdalens", taken from among the most devout of the penitents, dedicated to a life of severe penance for the salvation of the other girls. The other section was far more

innovative. Pelletier wished to have a class called *la Preservation* for orphans and small girls in moral danger, who were styled *les préservées*, the preservates. These children were taken in for a fee, given by their sponsors, who could be their own parents. To open a section (called a class) for them became standard practice for all the refuges she founded over the century, which means for the majority of such establishments in France, particularly when the White Sister houses initiated her initiative. The acceptance of small girls contributed greatly to the expansion of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers because, had it only accepted penitents who came from the underworld of prostitution, it is unlikely that so many foundations would have been needed. The girls who could not be compelled to stay left for the most part after a period of less than two years: those who were put in as minors by parents or guardians had to remain until they were at least sixteen, and sometimes longer, if a contract had been signed to that effect. Not only did they require living space for several years, but their work was the property of the convent. No study has been made on the use of its inmates' labour in the case of religious bodies in France who took in destitute children, but there is evidence to suggest that the possession of a virtually captive labour force could lead to exploitation; it could certainly be a great provider of income.⁵

Pelletier's innovative and organising power, harnessed to her desire to do a great work of salvation, provided the driving force for an enormous extension of her congregation's work, once the opportunity to act was given. This came through Gregory XVI's Brief of 3 April, 1835, transforming her autonomous congregation into a generalate, with herself as its head, and no restriction on her terms of office. This permission, which put her directly under the authority of a cardinal protector instead of that of her diocesan bishop, created a great deal of hostility towards the congregation in clerical circles in France, where a struggle for spiritual control of the national church was developing between Paris and Rome. Mother Pelletier was accused of being

⁵ For a more particular statement of the case see Ch.IX.

hungry for power, even tyrannical, by her own bishop, Mgr Angebault, while her friends saw her as a martyr to her sense of mission, whose sufferings proved the value of her work:

But it was not from visible enemies only that her tribulations came. Unseen by material eyes, envoys of darkness approached her to molest her: fears, anguish, troubles of conscience, torments of the soul, hopeless sadness, which she fought with prayer and which she never suffered to appear exteriorly. When she was alone, sudden strange and terrifying noises would break forth around her. On one occasion the disturbance was so terrible, the Mother sent for a Magdalen in whom she had great confidence, and asked her to spend one hour in prayer in her company. The weird sounds and frightful crashes continued. The sister, troubled for a moment, listened to the hideous clatter, then quite calmly spoke her mind: "Mother, this is the evil one, who is furious at the works you are doing to save souls and prevent their going to hell."⁶

This interpretation of the disturbances is the only one possible if the source of the Mother General's inspiration is held to be that of the Holy Spirit. It was not possible for anyone in her entourage, or even in the general public, to suppose that the repressed forces of her own psyche might be responsible for the ugly and frightening manifestations which bedevilled her, but was there no justice in the accusation that she was eager for power? An incident which occurred about this time, and which throws light on the costly obedience which she expected to command, was frequently recounted by her to her novices. It concerned Sr Marie de St Basil Joubert, a highly gifted recruit, who had made her profession in 1833.

What piety, what humility, what devotedness she possessed! When she was only a novice, we could trust her with the important employments that we would give to the oldest professed sisters...At the end of a day given up to incessant labour, her amiability was the charm of our recreations...Having reason to think that she would perhaps be named Superior of a new House, she begged of God in earnest prayer, which was but too surely heard, that she might rather die than be named to an office which she believed was so far above her strength. The very day on which she was elected Superior, fever set in and in a few days she

⁶ Powers, *Redemption*, p.196. The Magdalen's simple answer contained the same explanation that John Vianney, the cure d'Ars, put upon similar recurrent behaviour by his poltergeist from 1824 until his death thirty-five years later.

was taken from us.⁷

Sister Joubert died in August 1837, only four years after her profession. No guilt or dismay is betrayed by the narrator; the short duration of such a promising life is seen as having taken place as a result of supernatural intervention, not mental exhaustion. The Mother General accepts no responsibility for the young woman's anguish, although it was she who controlled all promotions. The manner of her presentation of this anecdote to her novices shows two things: that she sanctioned the suffering and death brought about by Sr Joubert's overuse by her superiors. It suggests also that the unhappy woman had not dared refuse an increase in her labours, which would have been disobedience, but had been allowed to pray urgently for death. The novices who heard this story, and doubtless others like it which are yet unpublished, were being told in effect that they might sanction the overworking of those who would one day be under their authority, and that the only acceptable release from their demands was to come from events apparently outside the control of their subordinates, in particular from sickness and death.

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While overseeing her congregation and the ever-flowing stream of postulants which filled the mother house, giving it at one point the largest novitiate in Europe,⁸ the abundant emotional energy of the Mother General found release in a large correspondence, of which a selection was published by the order in 1985.

The privileged writer of *Regards neufs sur Sainte Marie-Euphrasie*, who was able to examine all the letters, noted their frequency, their maternal tone, their lively style,

⁷ Instructions of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, Ch. XXXVIII.

⁸ Noted at a tutorial conducted by Dr Ch. Langlois in Paris, Spring 1985.



the directness of the Mother General's approach to a subject, her wit, her emotion and her interest in every detail.⁹ Bernonville also found that a great many letters mentioned money: almost all of them spoke of suffering and the cross. Apparently Pelletier thought nothing of moving her delegates from house to house like pieces on a chessboard, whether the women concerned were ready for the change or not, although the Mother General's expression of strong personal affection for the obedient daughters who conducted her numerous houses was probably a powerful counter-irritant.

It would appear that Pelletier lived a vivid emotional life by means of her letters, in a way that her circumstances did not allow her to do openly, and in this she was, of course, like many nineteenth-century women of the educated classes. Those of her subordinates whose position allowed them to be her correspondents also seem to have experienced a release of emotional tension.

How could a woman in a position of such authority, surrounded by respectful, even adoring daughters, present herself as a suffering victim? For she had to do so in order to endorse the austerities which those beneath her were compelled to bear. These were not few. Unquestioning obedience was expected of all, painful obedience, hard work, repression of speech and energy, a penitential suffering. Hard as this may have been for the novices and professed, it must have been exceptionally hard for sponsored children placed in the convent to secure them from moral danger, for as evidence given in Chapter IX will show, they were there principally to work and obey. Regarding the penitents proper, those girls who came in free because "they were in the condition for which the charity was founded",¹⁰ one can only imagine what they had to suffer from boredom and repression as well as from the guilt which it was the nuns' duty to encourage. The Mother General was aware of the severity of their sufferings: in a Chapter XXVIII of her *Conferences and Instructions* she says, "To keep silence they

⁹ Trans. by Sr. M.J. Morrison as *Spirit and Charism*.

¹⁰ They were prostitutes. Ref. from Henri Joly, *Les Maisons du Bon-Pasteur*, Paris, 1901, p.11.

must do themselves unheard-of violence." In another, given on the first day of Lent, she acknowledged that the penitents "go through indescribable struggles to fast and in the observance of ^silence".¹¹

Although spared by her position from the mental isolation of her lower subordinates, she sought physical trials, mortifying her flesh continually, never renewing clothes or bedlinen until they were falling apart, taking very little food at all times, sleeping on horsehair while her nuns slept on wool. The sisters asked the Cardinal Protector to forbid her the use of the instruments of penance, fearing that she suffered too much.¹² He did so, but "then the Lord sent her weaker health", which she accepted as a substitute for the self-imposed ill treatment that had been denied her.¹³

Her health was, perhaps, a response to the double life of a woman in her situation and time, a situation in which she embodied the virtues of holy resignation and complete self control before a large, attentive audience, while within, as her letters testify, she suffered from loneliness, from the hostility of her detractors and, while deeply involved in spiritual conflict with evil, was all the time tormented by ceaseless questions of material ways and means. On the long journeys which she took to her daughter foundations, and on her two visits to Rome, it is reported that she suffered heart attacks and fainting spells, possibly a sign of her fear of being outside the walls, for she had lived shut up in an institution since the age of twelve. She also had so many carriage accidents that demonic intervention was concluded to be the cause. According to Sandreau, her liver was disordered and fever scarcely ever left her. In 1842 her left side was badly bruised in a carriage accident, resulting in a cancerous tumour of the breast, which she kept hidden until a month before her death.¹⁴ This reticence, then so characteristic of a nun, was part of the state of mortification in which she had kept both

¹¹ *Conferences of the Venerable Mother Mary of St Euphrasia Pelletier*, 2nd ed., London, 1907, p.183.

¹² The whip, the hair shirt, studded belts or chains wrapped tightly around the body.

¹³ *The Secret of the Sanctity of St M.E.*, etc., p.86.

¹⁴ One must admit that had she let a doctor treat it, his remedies would probably have been both painful and useless.

flesh and spirit since youth. At times she was tormented, in the last years of her life, with "dreadful images of vice which would keep rising up before the pure eyes of a soul which, in the considered opinion of prudent directors, had never lost its baptismal innocence." These night visions left Marie-Euphrasie bathed in the sweat of horror. In the morning she would say to her confessor, "Oh no, Father, I did not offend God, did I? I took no pleasure in that abominable spectacle."¹⁵

Had she refused to make any new foundations beyond a certain point of financial risk, her institute would have soon achieved stability, for everyone in it worked, but this was the thing that she could or would not do. Eudist theology justified her desire to extend the sphere of her influence wider and wider, because of the redemptive work that forcible seclusion and exposure to the Church's teaching was supposed to effect in the lives of the penitents and preservatives. The founder of the White Sisters had said that to clothe a soul with the grace of God and to feed it by good example and religious instruction was more important than all works of charity devoted merely to the recipients' physical wellbeing.¹⁶ This doctrine may easily be used to justify the founding of institutions without being assured beforehand that they will receive adequate financial support, in fact to do so may be seen as a laudable act of faith. No other institution except the Roman Catholic Church, and only in the nineteenth century, would have afforded a woman the chance to control the lives of thousands of her fellows throughout the world. Even so, her ability to direct the largest organisation ever seen for the rehabilitation of sexually disgraced females was dependent upon her obedience to the direction of Rome, which during the last century was nothing if not reactionary. That is why the charity's vast personnel was directed to use the same methods for the rehabilitation of guilty women as the little communities of White Sisters

¹⁵ Bernonville, *St M.E. Pelletier*, p.166. Sandreau also reported this, giving the name of the confessor, who took office in 1861. He must have testified at an early stage of her canonisation process.

¹⁶ From paragraph IV of the list of considerations written by John Eudes "for the frequent consideration" of the sisters, and found on p. 21 of the *Regle de Saint-Augustin et constitutions pour les religieuses de la Congrégation de N.-D. de Charité' du Bon Pasteur d'Angers*, Rome, 1936.

had done in the the seventeenth century.

Soon after Mother Pelletier's death in April, 1868, the order began proceedings relevant to the canonisation of its foundress, who was declared Venerable by Pope Leo XIII in December 1897. On 24 February, 1924, her virtues were pronounced heroic. In April 1933 she was beatified by Pius XI and canonised seven years later by Pius XII on May 2nd, 1940.

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Three laywomen - Lamourous, Rondeau, Chupin.

An important characteristic of the foundresses of the three small refuges described in the following pages is that they came to their work straight from everyday life in the world. Two of them were used to dealing with working-class women, and all of them had had years of personal independence before they responded to the voice of conscience, which they accepted as a medium of the divine call. Each tried to live among their penitents rather as Madame de Combe had done in the seventeenth century, keeping the number of the congregation proper very small, behaving as a strictly pious mother among a large family of children, of whom the subordinate lay sisters took the role of elder daughters.

Lamourous, born into the governing classes, was able to impose her own limitations on her work, constantly refusing to seek official recognition, to train novices or to make secondary foundations. Rondeau, the youngest, nearly became a casualty in the battle between good and evil that her director had led her into, but subsequently took control of her house and appears thereafter not to have allowed any ecclesiastic to become too important in her life. All three women were subjected to great trials of faith and patience by the nature of their work, but only in Chupin's case did the worst of such difficulties result directly from hostile action by the male hierarchy.

It will appear from the account of their lives how close a bond existed between Lamourous and Rondeau, due in part to the very caring, maternal spirit of the former. In the absence of permission to examine the archives of the Refuge Sainte Anne, it has not been possible to give much of an idea of the affective life of Thérèse Chupin, but the loyalty of her much younger First Assistant, Mlle Lefort, which lasted a lifetime, suggests that they too found great comfort in the mother-daughter relationship, a form of love which is permitted to women in conventual organisations. Like Rose Virginie

Pelletier, all three of them had lacked a father's support, either because of his early death or his inability to care for his daughter. Unlike her, all three had had loving mothers.

Lamourous and Rondeau called their work new because they did not know that penitents had, centuries earlier, dwelt in family unity with lay sisters. Before the Revolution Bordeaux and Laval, their respective fields of operation, had each had a "refuge" which was little more than a state-subsidised prison for prostitutes. Crude repression, or lodgement in the convents run by the White Sisters, of which there were not many, was all that eighteenth-century France had produced since the twelfth century to deal with disturbed, vagabond or homeless girls who had used prostitution to earn their daily bread.

The first and second of the three foundresses about to be described did not despise the severe disciplines intrinsic to the cloistered life, indeed they revered them and believed them an infallible cure for depravity. If the cure did not work failure was not ascribed to wrong methods, but to the fault of human nature. What they offered along with this discipline was an attempt at a family atmosphere, a softening of rigid hierarchical distinctions, a sharing of the common things of life, as well as the severe routine which combined the decorum of a boarding school with the unrelenting toil of an *atelier*. If their houses were rejected by most of the girls they hoped to serve - as the evidence seems to suggest - this does not diminish their right to be admired for the purity of their intentions and the charity with which they put them into practice.

Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte de Lamourous (1 November 1754 - 14 September 1836) Founded the Miséricorde de Bordeaux on 1 January, 1801.

Mlle de Lamourous was born two months before time, at Barsac, a rich rural city in Gascony celebrated for its wines, into a family belonging to an ancient line of *noblesse de robe*, parliamentary lawyers from father to son. At her birth the child was so weak, and had such a hairy appearance that its parents did not allow it to be seen for four days. Rousseau's *Emile* was eight years in the future, but the baby's mother was too tenderhearted to allow any but herself to breastfeed this child whose life hung by a thread. Six more girls and three boys were born to her in the next twelve years, but the link between the mother and the eldest daughter remained very strong. It was natural, under these circumstances, that Marie-Thérèse should imitate her mother's fervent piety, which appears from its strictness to have been influenced by the Jansenism then favoured by the *parlementaires* of Bordeaux, in part as a sign of their independence vis a vis the court.¹⁷ The diocese itself "was always protected by its archbishops from that particular heresy", wrote Roger Guitraud, for the Jesuit influence was supreme in the city, but their interpretation of the faith remained severe.¹⁸

Longing for perfection, the young noblewoman chose a spiritual director who embodied devotion to the pope with an unbending morality. She wished to enter Carmel, but he dissuaded her, perhaps because her painful sensitivity to her own failings would have been exacerbated by the cloistered life. At thirty she made a mental vow of perpetual chastity, during the marriage service of one of her sisters. Five years later, early in 1789, death robbed her of the companionship of her mother.

Between April 1792 and the fall of Robespierre, 176 people were guillotined in Bordeaux for "fanaticism in religion", meaning that they preferred the services of illegal, nonjuring priests to those authorised by the state. Lamourous and her father

¹⁷ Auguste Giroudin, Pr. *Marie-Thérèse Charlotte de Lamourous, Fondatrice de la Miséricorde de Bordeaux*, 2nd ed., Bordeaux, 1912, p.17.

¹⁸ Abbé Roger Guitraud, *Mlle de Lamourous*, (booklet) Libourne, 1971, p.8.

retired to a small farmhouse among their vineyards at Pian-Médoc, where Marie-Thérèse entered upon the most exciting period of her life. Not only did she shelter rebellious priests, but gave religious instruction secretly to villagers and their children living nearby. She made many visits to Bordeaux in order to attend clandestine gatherings among the faithful, little societies which met for prayer and whose members, both clerical and lay, offered themselves to God as victims for the conversion of sinners. The future foundress also acted as a double agent. She was a popular woman, whose outward mien remained frank and genial whatever her inward state of mind. She made friends with some of the members of the revolutionary committee of surveillance in Bordeaux, and so was able to obtain advance information concerning suspects who were due for arrest, whom she forewarned. Inevitably her own turn came, but she managed to charm the arresting officers by a combination of wine and wit, so that they had not the heart to take her in, being local men.

During this time the abbe G.J. Chaminade, future founder of the Marianist order, had lived hidden in Bordeaux. After the fall of Robespierre in 1794 he opened an oratory, which became a centre of spiritual renewal in the city and its surrounding area. Lamourous was drawn into his orbit and chose him as her spiritual director. Aware of the torment she endured from an over-active conscience, Chaminade put strict limits on her outward practices of religion.¹⁹ Use of a hair-shirt or a "discipline" was forbidden. He saw that his *dirigée*, outwardly "full of courage and audacity", was inwardly "anxious, tormented...by the fear of divine judgment, and never knew peace...she feared to make the slightest opposition to the divine love...she doubted her own best intentions and believed herself obliged to renounce anything that might give her pleasure. The most lucid intelligence, the most correct judgement, stand disarmed

¹⁹ R. Guitraud, former chaplain of the Miséricorde de Libourne, *Mlle de Lamourous*, Vol. I, typed document, not for publication, Pian-Medoc, 1964, p.136. The abbe made use of the archival resources of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux.

before this malady of the conscience."²⁰ It stands to reason that if someone with such a malady is put in authority over other sinners, whose crimes against God she believes even blacker than her own, her conscience will have difficulty in accepting that her charges have done penance enough, however many years they may have spent within her establishment. Perhaps because of this, and to her credit, she very rarely accepted small children into what must have been an environment constantly overshadowed by the fear of hell.²¹

In November 1800 Chaminade asked Lamourous to assist him in the management of "the Congregation", an association formed to build up a lay apostolate in Bordeaux. At the same time she received an appeal from another quarter. In 1784 another noblewoman of Bordeaux, Jeanne de Pichon-Longueville, had opened a shelter for *femmes dévoyées* (women who had gone astray), but the Revolution had closed it. In July 1800 she assisted "one of these poor creatures" by renting a room for her. Others asked for the same help, so that by August 1800 Mlle de Longueville supported 15 penitents, under the care of a watchful landlady. Overwhelmed by such rapid success, the benefactress turned to Lamourous for help. The response was at first indignant, for this was not the "call" that had been expected. However

...despite her extreme repugnance, (she) through her great generosity for God, accepted the suggestion of her friend that she should at least see these poor creatures. Mlle de Lamourous went accordingly, and *voilà*, as soon as she found herself in the midst of them, her great repugnance disappeared and was replaced by a torrent of peace which flooded her soul...

She recognised this experience as the gift of the divine charism, the anointing by which she received *grace d'état*, according to catholic teaching, but her human nature resisted it:

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.133.

²¹ An examination of the registers shows that between 1800 and 1841 only 40 girls were accepted below the age of 10 yrs.

But as soon as Mlle de Lamourous had left them, her repugnance returned in force, she again experienced her indignation, and withdrew with the resolution, so to speak, of never coming back.²²

But she did come back, several times, "always kind and polite, saying to them, as she shook their hands: 'Good day, my children, good day!'".

Besought both by her friend and her director to render active service to the Church, she was now torn by anxiety, fearful of disobeying the divine command, yet not knowing which sacrifice was required. Chaminade left her free to choose whom she would serve, the young Christian ladies attracted to his Congregation, or the disgraced and destitute women who had strayed from the narrow path. Naturally her family opposed the latter choice. Alone at Pian, she meditated these things. On New Year's Day, 1801, she had a dream in which she saw the Last Judgement. On the lip of hell the lost girls screamed their reproaches: "If you had come, we would have been saved!" Next morning she left for Bordeaux and by that night she had taken up residence with the fifteen penitents. She and Chaminade quickly composed a rule of life for the conduct of the house, which they decided to call "La Miséricorde" in opposition to the name of "refuge", which traditionally always implied some degree of involuntary confinement. The dream - accepted as a message from God - had allowed Lamourous' maternal heart to overcome her prejudices; it had also, characteristically, directed her into the more difficult of the two paths open to her. Yet there was generosity in her willingness to suffer. Evidently her beliefs regarding what was necessary for the attainment of personal sanctity prepared her to accept a rule for her house which embodied a penitential discipline, but she deliberately kept her institution small, requiring her lay sisters to live on equal terms with the girls and women taken in. Her correspondence allows the reader to believe that she was a loving mother superior to all.

²² Guitraud, typed document, etc., Vol 1, p.155, citing an account by one of de Lamourous' nieces in the archives of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux, at Pian.

In 1813, in search of funds for her house, she travelled alone to Paris at the age of 68, where she spent some weary months petitioning the bureaucracy, leaving the community in the charge of eight laywomen, three of whom were her own teenage nieces:

At last I am here in Paris, my dear and good girls. I am very well, but you, how are you, dear children? How are you all, not only my five limbs but my three little girls and all my dear daughters? Do they follow their rule?...Are they loving?...I see you everywhere, my dear children...I walk up and down among my three classes.²³

...Let's talk about you, my heart's dear children...How is the shopping going, Fannie? How is the sewing, my dear Rose? The flowers and the embroidery, my dear Josephine? The girls, my poor Laure, and your interviews on Sundays, etc?...²⁴

The foundress must have had a deep longing for children. Guitraud says that her spiritual director would not allow her to take a vow of chastity earlier than at thirty, which suggests that he knew that she retained a great deal of what the Church saw as attachment to the flesh. After her return from Paris the sisters presented her on behalf of the whole community with a piece of fine embroidery, done by some of the girls and mounted on a frame. It showed the legendary pelican, piercing its breast so as to feed its young with its own blood, the symbolic image of sacrificial motherhood.

The desire to cherish and sustain appears to have been the foundation stone of Lamourous' virtues. It was coupled with a humility born of scruples, a state of mind which ensured that she had constant need of her spiritual director, who appears to have taken a continuous interest in the Bonne Mère and her penitents.²⁵ No decision connected with spiritual matters was taken without his advice. The relationship between

²³ Jean Balde, *Les Dames de la Miséricorde*, Paris, 1932, p.90. ²⁴ *Ibid*, p.96.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.96.

²⁵ His concern for her appears to continue beyond the grave, if we consider that his Marianist order has taken up Lamourous' cause for beatification as well as that of the canonisation of their own founder. In 1978 the Historical Office of the Sacro Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum published the *Positio des Virtue de Marie-Thérèse Caroline [sic] de Lamourous, P. 1: la vie, les travaux et la mort*, a document prepared by Father Joseph Verrier.

the two may be presumed to have been one of close friendship, indeed the foundress appears to have had the power to attach people to her, to have made many friends but no enemies. Although she had administrative troubles, and was burdened with a crippling illness in old age, she does not seem to have received coldness, treachery or ingratitude from others, unless it was from penitents who did not respond favourably to the discipline of the house. It is possible that in some cases their desire to leave was seen as a betrayal of trust, but from friends, equals and superiors Lamourous received no harm. The deep attachment which Thérèse Rondeau developed for her demonstrates the power and warmth of the older woman's personality, radiating across the distance of age and class, even to the last years of her life. Despite this good fortune there was always a side of her which lay in shadow. Alone before God, she saw herself as one who deserved nothing and who had done nothing of merit. All Christians of her day would have been familiar with this ungrateful idea, but few would have taken it seriously enough to accept work among the sexually disgraced, as she did. In 1796 she had made an offering of herself to God, signed in her own blood; and renewed formally for the next ten years. It began:

O justice of God, be appeased here and now and let your infinite mercy act in eternity. Here and now let me be saddened by my ingratitude, by my unfaithfulness; here and now may I run apparently in vain after the fragrance of your perfumes, that I have disdained so often, and to which I preferred sensual pleasures and natural consolations! I agree, if necessary, O my God, to pass my life deprived of the feeling of grace, in interior desolation whose bitterness you alone may appreciate, so as to expiate my pride, my presumption, my self-love and my love for creatures...²⁶

This is a prayer that could have come from the heart of one of her sexually experienced penitents. It seems likely that the sensitive conscience compelling Lamourous towards acts of contrition which, according to Guitraud, her confessor sometimes had to forbid,

²⁶ R. Guitraud, *La Spiritualité: l'Esprit de la Fondation Lamourous*. Typed document, Pian-Medoc, undated, p.15. He quotes Arch. Mis. Bordeaux, *Papiers intimes*.

also led her to identify herself with her "poor sinners", who had loved too much, or at least that is how she may have interpreted their fall from grace. This suggests another reason for the desire that in her house, in direct contrast to the practice of Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge, both lay sisters and penitents should live as one family:

The sisters do not form a community. No other community is recognised in the house but that of the penitents united to the Congregation which directs them, which was made for them and which is a stranger to any other work.²⁷

The Good Mother taught by example the abnegation of self, but she did not cease to be genial and witty in personal contacts. She knew that her girls were "discouraged by trifles, encouraged by trifles,"²⁸ and so used what she called *saintes charlataneries* - "holy trickery" or pious fraud - to persuade them to change their minds when they wished to leave the house against her advice. There are certain anecdotes recording this, repeated by all her biographers, which show the homeliness of the provincial lady's contacts with her penitents, her use of dialect, her sense of fun. Meanwhile, in the *for intérieur*, she imitated the heroism of the saints and used the medium of her difficult work to plunge into suffering for God. Indeed this does not differentiate her; each of the founding mothers in this study did as much.

The lives of Rose Virginie Pelletier and M.C.T. de Lamourous show up the major difference between the refuges mentioned here. That is to say the difference that exists between the large institution run deliberately as a body which will generate many similar structures, and whose financial needs require a large labour force constantly at work, and the small congregation which aims at little more than self-sufficiency. In the former the foundress has almost no direct contact with the subjects for whom her work was founded; her affectivity is spent on subordinates in the hierarchy who are themselves in positions of authority and who are instructed to keep themselves physically and

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.42, quoting de Lamourous' *Notes for a Constitution*.

²⁸ Balde, *Les D. de la Mis.*, p.12, quoting an oral tradition of the house.

therefore socially apart from the objects of the order's charity. The mother superior of the latter type of institute, which is made up of lay sisters, lives as the centre of a small network of affective interaction which draws its strength from her maternal interest, an interest which includes the penitents and the *surveillantes* drawn from their numbers.

The life of Thérèse Rondeau, who attempted to duplicate Lamourous' work among sexually disgraced girls and women in Laval, is relevant because it shows how much protection a woman suffering from severe mental illness might receive within a refuge, thanks to the spirituality of the day, which glorified suffering. Her experiences and those of Thérèse-Agathe Chupin also illustrate, by means of the kind of hostility the two women aroused, how unlikely it was that a convent refuge would be controlled by women whose background had given them some practical insight into the difficulties and temptations of the poor.

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the preaching of Chanon, a former soldier whose face had been marked by a sabre cut, fired her with an urgent desire to work for the unsaved. She asked him to be her spiritual director, a bold step for a working-class woman, but he showed his appreciation of her abilities by giving her three of his own penitents to look after, women "of very little morality"³⁰, who had been converted during the mission. At the same time two other priests of Laval asked her to foster the spiritual life of a couple of similar converts. These five did not live with Thérèse, but she counselled them, begged alms for them and tried to find them work.

Father Chanon thought so well of his *dirigée* that he told his colleagues that he had found "the second volume of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux".³¹ This unusual metaphor contained his hope that she would prove to be a foundress of the type and quality of Mlle de Lamourous. Both Chanon and Chapelle had seen her work at Bordeaux and for some time the former had wished to found a similar refuge at Laval, and was therefore disappointed when Rondeau eventually found the girls entrusted to her beyond her control. She asked him several times to release her from the obligation of caring for them in favour of someone older, giving it as her opinion that unless the women could be encouraged to live in one house, apart from society, they would never have the strength to reform. At the same time, without Chanon's knowledge and despite her family ties, she had made her own decision regarding her future. It is obvious that she found ordinary life in the world frustrating, as all her sympathies were directed towards spiritual and evangelical goals. In 1817 the bishop of Quimper had invited Sophie Barat to found a congregation of the Sacred Heart in his city. Rondeau made the acquaintance of the sisters as they passed through Laval, and asked to be accepted as a postulant. She was invited to enter the mother house at Paris, but when

³⁰ Bru, *T. Rondeau*, etc, p.37, quoting from a contemporaneous account in the archives of the Miséricorde made by Mere Thérèse de Jesus, Rondeau's friend, successor and first biographer (unpublished).

³¹ Le Segretain du Patis, *La vie de la Mere Thérèse, fondatrice de la Miséricorde de Laval*, Laval, 1875, p.69.

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Thérese-Agathe Rondeau (6 October 1793 - 16 July 1866) Founded the Miséricorde de Laval in November, 1818.

Thérese Rondeau was born in the city of Laval, in the Mayenne, on 6 October, 1793 and officially baptised by a constitutional priest a few days later. Her father was a blacksmith, her mother the daughter of peasant farmers (*laboureurs*). Like Pelletier and Lamourous she was born into an area traditionally loyal to Catholicism, where for a time adherence to the old religion was an act of defiance punishable by death. The ink of the child's birth entry in the town hall registers was scarcely dry, wrote her latest biographer, Antoine Bru, when the Chouans sent the building up in flames, just before their defeat by the army of the Convention.²⁹ Her parents placed her in a charity school run by nuns when she was nine. By the age of sixteen she had her own ironing business. Two years later, to her great embarrassment, her mother gave birth to a second child, a boy; the following year her father died, leaving her to be the family's chief breadwinner.

From her childhood, according to Bru, Rondeau took religion seriously, giving away her food and even her clothing to the poor. During her adolescence and early womanhood she divided her energies between the twelve hours' work that her trade required and care of the sick or the distressed, which took up all her spare time. When she was 22 her devotion and goodwill were given a specific direction, leading eventually to the foundation of the establishment by which she is remembered.

In the early years of the Bourbon restoration the Society of Jesus undertook preaching missions throughout provincial France, calling the faithful to acts of reparation for the sacrileges permitted by the Revolution. One of the fathers, Etienne Chanon, then 37 years old, was part of a team which preached a mission at Laval in 1816 and subsequently opened a seminary there. Thérese was already converted, but

²⁹ Antoine Bru, *Thérese Rondeau, Fondatrice de la congrégation Notre-Dame de la Miséricorde de Laval*, Entrammes, 1984, p.10.

Chanon heard of it he commanded her to give up the idea. He then put pressure on her which she was not equipped to resist. His colleague at Laval, Fr Chapelle, who was revered as a holy man and a healer, undertook three days of prayer for Rondeau's benefit and then made a prophesy to the young woman, who was deeply impressed.

[He] told her that he was certain that God wanted her to stay in Laval and not to be a nun of the Sacred Heart. "That is not the thing for you," he added. "God is calling you into a non-cloistered house, which is not founded yet and whose purpose is unknown to me,...this establishment will suffer great difficulties...Everyone will be against you," he said, "even good priests. Sometimes you will lack bread and you will even suffer violence."³²

As a result of Chapelle's prediction Rondeau left the choice of her future field of service entirely in Chanon's hands. In July 1818 he sent her to stay for three months in the Miséricorde of Bordeaux, where she was treated as a novice and a future foundress, a circumstance flattering to her self-esteem. In November she returned to Laval to open her own "Miséricorde". Normally, in a religious order of the time, it would take a postulant up to two years to become a professed choir nun and several years longer to become a superior, but as Lamourous' foundation had no officially sanctioned constitutions, such regulations could be ignored.

It is surprising that experienced clerics should have encouraged an intelligent but poorly educated woman to undertake a task as difficult as the foundation of a convent refuge, after such a short training period. The work of a superior not only included the religious instruction of the penitents but financial and administrative problems as well, with which Rondeau's background had not familiarised her. Her lack of the middle-class social graces must have been exposed whenever she had to enter into relations with her bishop or his agent, or take part in an interview with potential benefactors. But under the Restoration the evangelists of the revived Catholic Church had set themselves

³² Bru, *T. Rondeau etc.*, p.42, quoting from the account of Mr Th. de Jésus. Even today people in Laval honour the memory of Father Chapelle; they take infants to walk over his grave to strengthen their legs.

to win the whole nation back to God: for this, no sacrifice was too great. It seems that Chanon was prepared to place Rondeau's health and reputation at risk for the sake of his urgent desire to save souls, and that his colleagues (including Joseph Chaminade of Bordeaux, whose cooperation would have been necessary) thought he was justified. The young foundress was undoubtedly a woman of unusual self-confidence and strength of purpose. Moreover the teaching of the Church in nineteenth-century France laid emphasis on the enabling graces that a soul might win from God, if it endured unmerited suffering, or deliberately sought it. Even Rondeau's dislike of the work Chanon had asked her to do was probably, in his mind, only another reason for continuing it.

The mystic Purgatory

When Rondeau returned to open Notre Dame de Miséricorde de Laval in November 1818, her director might well congratulate himself on having chosen wisely for her, because of the number and variety of crosses which she was called upon to bear, a mark of Heaven's confidence in her strength.³³ To do him justice, he did all he could to help the work forward, but he was often away preaching missions. The new Bonne Mere, as she was called, had very little practical direction, except for the many letters which she received from Lamourous to whom she related as to a dear and respected mother.

The aristocrat of Bordeaux had accepted the blacksmith's daughter as her own, in Christ. Although Rondeau's natural mother lived within her congregation for thirty years, her position with regard to her parent was that of a religious superior to a permanent boarder. It was to the experienced old lady, who understood her love of

³³ Compare the following quotation from a letter by Frayssinous to Lamennais, given on p.65 of *Prophecy and Papacy*, by Alec Vidler: "Vous allez a l'ordination come une victime au sacrifice. Le saint autel est dépouillé pour vous de ses ornements, le calice enivrant a perdu ses délices et nu vous embrassez et suivez la croix toute nue....Qu'avez-vous donc fait au Pere céleste pour qu'il daigne ainsi vous traiter comme son fils bienaimé?"

God, that Rondeau sent for comfort or advice regarding the thorny path that she had agreed to follow. She had made one bad mistake at the very first in taking the stately religious name of "Thérese François de Borgia de la Croix". The population of Laval, clergy included, could not forgive her this harmless dignity, for François de Borgia had been a *grand seigneur*. The abbé Le Segretain du Patis, who had known the foundress well, wrote that

...people said that she was tired of being a simple working-class woman, that she wanted to raise herself in the world. They went as far as to reproach her for the name, de Borgia....That is why they shortened it to "Thérese Borgia", and in the street they threw this name in her face, in derision...Must it be told? Even some ecclesiastics,...spoke of her among themselves as "that religious maniac, Thérese Borgia" [*Thérèse Borgia l'illuminée*].³⁴

It is possible that her name and petit bourgeois status were not alone responsible for this, but that her origins, and the slander connected with her brother's birth, led people to think that she was involved with prostitutes because she was no better than they.

Not being regular nuns, neither she nor her sisters were bound to remain cloistered. Rondeau was often seen in the street, either on errands of business or mercy, for she continued to spend some of her evenings nursing the sick. It was then that the populace had the chance to gratify its contempt of the *parvenue* by throwing stones, spattering her with mud or emptying chamber-pots over her from first-floor windows. According to du Patis, children, "imitating the insolence of their parents" met her with an avalanche of snowballs and insults on one occasion. Her response to her frightened sisters displayed her faith in the power of unmerited suffering, for she said always "Don't worry; such things are a good omen; we shall succeed."

Her house endured and earned its living, while for ten years, wrote du Patis, the foundress patiently bore public hostility which met her whenever she went out, and

³⁴ Le Segretain du Patis, *La vie de la Mr T.*, etc., p.98.

which came from all levels of society within the little provincial city. Even the poor hated her, believing that alms which might have gone to them were diverted to the refuge. Gossip, widely accepted, said that her young brother was really her son, and that she had opened the refuge to atone for the sins of her own youth. Du Patis wrote that even in 1875, nine years after her death, it was still possible to find people who believed this calumny.³⁵

In the midst of these troubles the young Bonne Mere continued to believe that all her sufferings and those of her lay sisters, were bringing salvation into the lives of her penitents "to whom she was powerfully attracted, even irresistibly so, longing to be their mother, according to grace."³⁶ She also drew comfort from the ties both supernatural and emotional which she felt existed between herself and the Bonne Mère of Bordeaux, whom she had wished to be allowed to regard as the Mother General of their two houses. Lamourous had forbidden this; she was not well enough to undertake extra responsibilities, and she feared to attract the attention of the state by asking for the necessary authorisation, because she wanted to keep her unofficial status. Rondeau took her refusal to heart, believing that she had been considered personally unworthy. Their lack of physical contact grieved her. On 1 January, 1826, she wrote:

...As for the journey that I have been planning for the past six years, it was, in part, my consolation, as I thought of the happiness I should have in seeing you, *ma bonne mere*, but seeing that you disapprove of it, I am put into a state of pain and anxiety which I cannot describe. A crowd of painful ideas come to my mind...it is hard to deny the feelings of the heart, especially when it longs for an object whom it regards on earth as its centre, after God...I know that God expects great sacrifices of me...I began writing this letter of the first of the month, I could not finish it until the 16th, owing to the bad headaches that I have been experiencing...³⁷

Her sense of abandonment was deepened later that year by another grief.

³⁵ The registry of her brother's birth shows that Thérèse was present when it was made, on the very next day. If the gossip were true she must have been a very strong girl to be up and about so early.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.97.

³⁷ Verrier, *Positio*, p.505.

Rondeau's own father is barely mentioned by her biographers; his decease occurred six years before the foundation of the refuge. Her director, Etienne Chanon, had taken the place in her heart which was left vacant, or which perhaps had not even been filled. In September 1826 Chanon collapsed and died in the pulpit at the age of 47, while preaching at Laval. With great difficulty, and in secret, Rondeau obtained permission from the mayor of Laval, de Herc , for his body to be buried within the Mis ricorde. When the funeral procession passed the house on the way to the cemetery, it was prevailed upon to make a detour into the grounds, so that the Bonne Mere could pay her last respects. The coffin was carried into the chapel and the door instantly shut, much to the surprise of the following clergy. Impatience finally overcame civility and they entered the building just in time to see Rondeau and the sexton filling in Chanon's grave, which had been dug in advance beneath the floor before the altar. For years she could not suffer anyone to tread upon the slab which covered his tomb.³⁸

The following September she felt his absence even more, for he might have been able to save her from an insult which seemed to have been prepared for her by the whole city of Laval. The Duchesse d'Angoul me, daughter of Louis XVI, visited the loyal city in September 1827, its first royal visit since the time of Henri IV. Rondeau, naturally self-confident, never doubted that the princess, who was known to be a patron of all charitable works, would visit the Mis ricorde. She had herself addressed a memoir to the lady in 1824, asking for alms. Therefore the sisters and their penitents cleaned and decorated the various buildings and large garden which was by then their home, learned welcoming couplets and made rosettes of white ribbon to pin on their black dresses. The great day arrived; after various ceremonies the royal visitor asked to see a list of public institutions, of which she chose to visit only two, St Joseph's Hospital for the sick and the St Louis Hospital for old people and destitute children.³⁹

³⁸ *Le Segretain du Patis, Vie, etc.*, p.173, using a journal entry made by Sr. Theophile.

³⁹ *Relation du passage par Laval de S.A.R. Madame la Dauphine*, Laval, 1827.

Had she been advised to neglect the refuge, or was its name deliberately left off the list? It was by that time equal in size to the St Louis Hospital, which contained 184 patients.⁴⁰ Rondeau was bitterly disappointed. By the next day, Bru recounts, the local wits had improvised couplets ridiculing the foundress' humiliation. Perhaps Chanon's influence could have saved her from this; at least he might have successfully encouraged her to see it as yet another mark of divine favour. Doubtless the foundress attempted to experience every setback in that way, but the strain it must have put upon the reason as well as the morale of an essentially practical woman was eventually too much for her.

A year after the royal visit it was apparent that she had reached the end of her strength. On October 9, 1828, she found herself unable to move. Dr Bucquet of Laval, the leading medical specialist and a man who became very interested in her case, diagnosed brain fever, a common illness in the city at that time.⁴¹ He declared that the foundress had worn herself out by constant work and unremitting anxiety. A few days after his visit the Bonne Mere received extreme unction, to the consternation of the whole house. She had never had any more than the three months' training given in 1818 to prepare her for ten years of crushing responsibility, sometimes borne in the midst of great financial distress, watched by a largely hostile public. During this time she had risen regularly at 4.30 a.m., often after a very late night spent finishing work ordered from the house which was wanted in a hurry, or else patrolling the penitents' dormitories, a duty for which she felt personally responsible. In the daytime she had counselled, instructed and worked with the girls, encouraging them to sing simple hymns and carols, for she had a very sweet voice. When her duties were over she had not the luxury of a room to herself, but slept anywhere, on a straw mattress and a leather pillow. Besides this, the severity of the bodily penances which she performed

⁴⁰ Arch.de La Mayenne, V75 bis, régime des congrégations.

⁴¹ Unfortunately the archives of the Bucquet family do not contain any personal notes made by Dr J-B. D. Bucquet on the Bonne Mere's condition.

left scars which lasted until her death.⁴² Is it possible that during this time she could have had much patience with complaints of pain or fatigue coming from the disgraced females for whom she endured so much? Her willingness to accept such a mortified existence tells us something of the atmosphere of painful, even destructive self-denial in which those under her authority must have lived, with such an example before them. Did she have spiritual comfort in her time of trial? There is a book which belonged to the foundress in the archives of the Miséricorde, *Dieu Seul*, a re-edition of a work of piety by a seventeenth century theologian, H.M. Boudon.⁴³ In it the author describes the state of "holy hate" in which true servants of God should live. He is ready to condemn Christians, in particular those concerned with "good works", because they act not for God alone, but also to please themselves. He directs that each heart should be examined to see if it is sufficiently grounded in holy hate:

...if it is there, we do not seek delicacies in food, bed or clothing: we do not follow our own tastes in spiritual exercises, pleasure in conversation, satisfaction in the things we undertake. [If we do] that is not hating oneself; look at those miserable beings who hate others and treat them as enemies....They seek their enemies' harm...slander them, do all that they can to bring about their ruin. That is true hate.

Consider now whether you hate yourself: are you pleased to see your body illtreated by sickness? do you afflict it with penances? are you glad because of your mental sufferings? are you consoled if people speak ill of you, slander you, if you lose your goods, if you are reduced to poverty, if no-one loves you, if your name is ridiculed when people meet together, if your friends abandon you?

Boudon would have had to concede that poor Thérèse had acted as if she hated herself.

By Christmas she had recovered from brain fever only to fall sick immediately with kidney stone. The agony of the first attack of what was to be a recurrent malady left her very thin, barely able to stand alone. Her eight lay sisters proved their loyalty to

⁴² The details of Rondeau's illness are taken from Ch. VI of the biography by Le Segretain du Patis, who relied on the unpublished biography of Mr. Thérèse de Jesus and his own observations as chaplain of the Miséricorde.

⁴³ Henri-Marie Boudon, *Dieu Seul ou Association pour l'Intérêt de Dieu Seul*, Paris et Lyon, 1821. This little book was approved officially and recommended to the faithful by Bossuet and de la Brunetiere in 1662.

her at this time. The house did not close. Powerful bonds of affection and a strong sense of responsibility to their "lost sheep" had been created between them all during the foundation's trials. The sisters might have left easily enough, for they had taken no formally binding vows, yet they chose not to do so. For the duration of their Bonne Mere's illness, which eventually extended over two and a half years, they took care of everything, led by the second in command, Sister Théophile (Mlle Denis), who had had business experience before entering the community. Doubtless for some of the penitents the self-sacrificing spirit the sisters demonstrated was a positive which balanced the physical and emotional deprivation of their lives.

Finally Rondeau went beyond the point where her colleagues' devotion could uplift her spirit. She was left so weak by her physical illnesses that she fell into a deep depression which at times resembled schizophrenia. Du Patis recounts that she was tormented by despair, fearing that she constantly offended God, even by a word, a look, a gesture. All her past life seemed to her to have been a failure. She longed for death, moving through the house, head bent, avoiding all contact except that she constantly murmured to passers-by, "Pray for a poor sinner." She lost the power to read and write; she lost interest in her work and could barely be persuaded to greet any cleric, even the bishop, with courtesy. Her only activity was to sit alone and knit. As her bodily health improved her sisters vainly asked her to take a little responsibility, but she could not bear to speak to the penitents. This sounds as if she had been invaded by a great deal of previously repressed disgust and anger which she could not admit without committing mortal sin. People outside the congregation began to call her insane, to the great distress of her staff, who were blamed for the calamity. They had loved her too much, it was said, and God was punishing them by driving their Good Mother mad. Her deputy, Sister Theophile, wrote in her journal:

I had, from my first years in religion, given the most filial affection to the Bonne

Mere; I loved her with all my soul. That disturbed me. I said to myself, "What's this? I have left my poor mother, whose heart was broken by my sacrifice, to come here and attach myself to another mother whom I cherish as much, or perhaps more, than my own...No, that is not good, God alone deserves to be preferred to my own mother. I submitted this difficulty to our ecclesiastical superior, who dissipated it with these significant words: "Be at peace, you will never love her as much as she deserves."⁴⁴

It was this same ecclesiastical superior, who was also the chaplain, who found the remedy for the condition which Thérèse later called her "mystic Purgatory".⁴⁵ In the autumn of 1831 he decided to send the sufferer back to Bordeaux to see if that would cheer her, for her presence at Laval was useless to the house. Mademoiselle de Lamourous wrote a short, maternal invitation to the sick woman, ending with the words: "Take courage, my heart holds out its arms to you." When Rondeau and an attendant sister arrived, they found that the reverend mother had fallen ill with bronchitis and was thought to be dying. Rondeau became hysterical. She was told that if she would be absolutely silent, she might come to the door of the sickroom. Once there she fell on her knees and cried, "My God, I thank you! She still lives," then began to weep. She was drawn back from the doorway and to everyone's amazement, once her tears were dried she began to speak and relate to the others as if she had never been unwell. Two days later she found that she could read and write normally. At the same time Lamourous also improved, indeed she survived for four more years, in which she maintained an affectionate correspondence with the foundress of Laval. Before sending her back to confound her evil-wishers, she kept this faithful daughter with her for four months, spending time alone with her every day, doubtless "justifying the ways of God to man".

On 13 January 1832 Rondeau returned to Laval to resume her position as mother superior of her own house and to relieve Sister Theophile, who had borne all

⁴⁴ The various bishops who had authority over the city, either as part of the diocese of Le Mans or as the seat of the subsequent diocese of Laval, were apparently never hostile to Thérèse Rondeau.

⁴⁵ Aloys Pottier, *La Mere Thérèse et la Miséricorde de Laval*, Laval, 1920, p.i69. Only Pottier mentions Rondeau's possible suicidal temptations.

her responsibilities. The latter, worn out, died a year later during a short period of intense poverty when the refuge could barely feed its inmates. The July Revolution of 1830 had disrupted the trade of the Mayenne, causing the house to contract debts to the amount of 14,000fr, but it subsequently received large monetary donations. By the end of 1833 Rondeau had paid off all she owed on the building itself. From this point its fortunes prospered to the extent that news of it reached as far as Paris, as is shown by Parent Duchâtelet's praise of the foundress and her methods in the last chapter of the second volume of *De la Prostitution*.

The last thirty-three years of Rondeau's life confounded her detractors, but had she not recovered, had she continued to be subject to extreme melancholy, refusing food, avoiding all human contact, then it would be interesting to know how her sisters and the clergy on whom they relied for theological information would have interpreted her dreadful trial. Once she was through it, it was obvious to all that she had been placed for a time within "the crucible of anguish...by means of which the Lord had wished to make her share the privileged fate which he imparted always, under one form or another, to each of his principal servants."⁴⁶ "Our foundress," du Patis continued, "was not useless to her house, for she presented continually the spectacle of a victim attached to the altar of sacrifice, silent and motionless, waiting without a murmur for death or delivery, according to the good pleasure of her divine spouse." What a spectacle! What an interpretation of a woman's exhaustion and despair! How easily such an attitude of mind might accept certain forms of mental illness or suicidal tendencies among the penitents or staff as signs of the working of the Holy Spirit, yet dismiss expressions of anguished longing for the things of the outside world as the effects of satanic temptations. The same Boudon who advised Christians to hate themselves published another book a few years later, in response to the doubts entertained by those undergoing what he called "the temptations belonging to the

⁴⁶ Le Segretain du Patis, *Vie*, et.c, p.196.

religious life".⁴⁷ In the chapter on *Des tentations de reprobation, de découragement et de désespoir*, the writer describes forms of acute mental suffering which would be called pathological today. Boudon's advice to those who received these marks of "high predestination" was to maintain a constant effort to serve God still more, together with a constant repression of doubts about the creator's goodness. The hellish condition, the "alarm, fear, boredom and sadness" that fill the mind of the mentally disturbed saint, are the work of demons, but to experience them is a sign of the highest divine favour. A copy of this book is also part of the Miséricorde's library; its publication date shows that it was bought by one of Rondeau's successors, and also provides an example of the severe "tridentine" spirituality of the seventeenth century being still cherished in convents.

Father Aloys Potter, writing in 1910, considered that the "mystic purgatory" of the reverend mother was a classic case, conforming to the description given by St Ignatius of the spiritual desolation permitted by God to test his saints, and convince them that without him, they are nothing. The ninth rule of the *Spiritual Exercises*, entitled *Of the discernment of spirits*, describes the condition. It is to be recognised by loss of all conscious fervour, and of all warmth of love. Instead of interior movements which lead to desire for God alone, there are inclinations for earthly things, base things, from which arise a condition of darkness, trouble, scruples, agitations which lead the soul into a state of defiance, followed by despair. "It remains indifferent, sad, lukewarm, idle, and as if separated from its Lord and Creator...nothing soothes it, nothing gives it peace." Both du Patis and Pottier insisted that Rondeau was not unwell: "only superficial persons, strangers to questions of spirituality," could mistake her mystic state for mental illness.⁴⁸ Pottier thought that, in accordance with the spirituality of reparation, and in imitation of the Jesuit, Father Surin, a seventeenth-

⁴⁷ *Les Saintes Voies de la Croix*, [First edition 1671; many re-editions] Paris, 1867.

⁴⁸ Pottier, *La Mère Thérèse*, p.177.

century mystic, Rondeau may have been led secretly to offer her sanity in exchange for the salvation of her penitents.⁴⁹

Whatever one may think of this attitude with regard to a loss of mental health, it gave dignity to her sufferings and prevented the foundress from being placed perhaps for good in some dark hospital ward for the insane. After she recovered until her death in 1866, she always retained a calm sense that God was with her, wrote du Patis, but if she had not been sent to Bordeaux, or if Lamourous had died before she got there, it is possible that her ten years' work at the Miséricorde would have been forgotten and herself only mentioned in Laval with contempt or pity, as the woman who had taken on too much, and been struck down by God for it.



The preceding account shows what a large part class prejudice played in the virtual martyrdom of Thérèse Rondeau, and suggests that the very women whose experience of life among the poor might have made them more able to identify with their penitents' temptations, were the most unlikely to be allowed into positions of authority inside a convent refuge. The Bonne Mere Chupin also came from the lower rungs of the social scale, but in her case scorn or mistrust of her origins took the form of unpublicised efforts to dislodge her made by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Normally a woman of lower class origin could expect no higher rank than that of *soeur converse* within an established order. These sisters, who may have been accepted without any dowry and whose education had been limited, were destined to perform the manual work of the convent, remaining subordinate to the choir nuns all their lives, unless an unexpected inheritance allowed them to offer a gift to their house which was sufficiently

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.184.

large to effect their promotion. Chupin and Rondeau had better luck because they were born within a period when the Roman Catholic Church was fighting to re-establish its influence in France. Their spiritual gifts were sufficiently outstanding to have brought them the advantages of a spiritual director and the patronage of an influential male order, but both paid quite a high emotional price for these privileges.

Victoire Thérèse Chupin (30 July 1813 to 21 April 1896) Founded the Refuge Sainte Anne in 1854.

"Mlle Chupin....The heavenly rag-picker who has passed her life sorting through the rubbish of Paris, searching for souls."⁵⁰

Victoire Thérèse Chupin was the only one of the foundresses in this study whose birth occurred after the end of religious persecution in France, but she too was born into an area known for its traditional values, Brittany, a region almost as fervently loyalist after the Revolution as it was faithful to the Catholic church. Her father, as a boy of 15, had fled from Nantes with his parents to avoid the infamous *noyades*. Under Napoleon the family was able to return and the son, a practising Catholic, married and opened a small school. This venture failed, as did others, and at the time of Chupin's birth the family was in straightened circumstances. The author of her hagiography is vague with regard to this question, which suggests that the father's occupation was not capable of being romanticised. Monsieur Chupin's failings as a provider are attributed to an exaggerated piety which led him to go to mass instead of attending to his worldly responsibilities. His daughter wrote that her father made life very hard for her mother. Mme Chupin had nine children and died at 56. It was probably her faith which won the eldest girl for religion, and the father's behaviour (perhaps his sexual demands on her mother) which made her fear wedlock. When it became a question in the family of when or whom she should marry, she wrote that she became screwed up inside - *crispée interieurement* - and said in her heart, "How can I give up the best part of myself to a man, a weak and mortal creature? My God, I want to keep myself pure for you." Father Mortier, who had the privilege of reading her unabridged memoirs, commented that she was almost savagely dedicated to chastity. Because the account of her life is drawn almost entirely from his narrative, it will be brief. She is included because of the

⁵⁰ The Marquis Costa de Beauregard in an article quoted by Henri Bordeaux, author of the preface to the biography, *Bonne Mere, ou la Réverende Mere Chupin*, published by the Rev. Pr Mortier in Paris, 1926.

indications Mortier gives that she was not at all convinced that to do her job well she ought to be a nun. On the contrary she wished to run her house informally, but clerical pressure proved too much for her, illustrating that even when the foundress of a refuge had exceptional experience of life for one in her position, the clergy were not prepared for long to allow her to alter the traditional manner of running the institution. This may be a contributing factor to the smallness of the numbers of congregations dedicated to refuge work alone, and an indication of the conflict of ideas within catholicism in this regard. The Church taught that the salvation of a prostitute was precious in the sight of God, but then attempted to ensure that those that committed themselves specifically to this work should be middle-class virgins.

At twenty Chupin moved to Paris to keep house for one of her brothers, who lived in a room near the Church of Foreign Missions, in the rue du Bac, in the fashionable quarter of Saint Germain. Soon after her arrival she was asked to take charge of a group for unemployed girls run by the Patronage de la Sainte Enfance, a *confrérie* of pious, well-connected ladies led by the cure of the Mission Church, the abbé Noel. The ladies had not found it easy to relate to the children, whereas Thérèse, nearer to them in background and experience, handled them very well.

Hers was a nature not easily put off, frank, vigorous and outspoken. Despite an "inveterate repugnance towards shameful weakness", she bravely undertook the conversion of a woman well known in the quarter for her scandalous life, and succeeded. The talk occasioned by this act was reported by a certain Madame Cousin, wife of a chief of division at the Paris Prefecture, to her husband's superior, Baron Gabriel Delessert. The baron was in the process of renewing the personnel of Saint Lazare, and he sent a message to Chupin asking if she would accept a position as a *surveillante*, or female prison officer. Her biographer reported that she resisted all the Prefect's entreaties for a whole year before accepting it, but it is obvious from the way that Mortier handles this episode that, looking no further than the Bonne Mere's

memoirs, he believed the appointment to be far more responsible than it was, and that his heroine was placed in charge of the female staff in 1836. The registers of Saint Lazare merely contain an entry of 8th November, 1838, in which the name "Chupin" replaces that of another *surveillante*, marked "dead". The salary mentioned is only 800frs per annum, which means that Chupin was a junior officer, subject to the senior *surveillante* who received 1,000fr. It may be that Chupin had been employed in the prison for two years before she took the deceased Madame Adam's place, but there is no other mention of her name, except a ledger entry for 1844 remarking that she had been absent on leave. Her place, according to the ledger, was in the First Section.⁵¹ Her memoirs say that she was "head of the house at 22", but as she was 22 in 1835 she must have been mistaken. In any case, she could not have been head of the house, but only of a section: authority over the prison as a whole, under Delessert, was invested in a male director.

Whatever the exact details may have been, Chupin may well have hesitated for a year before deciding to work at Saint Lazare. Like Lamourous, she was finally shamed out of her reluctance to live among "women of evil life" by what she believed to be a divine admonition. On two consecutive nights she experienced a vision of the Virgin herself, "dressed as a nun so as not to frighten me".⁵² On both occasions the supernatural visitor reproached the young woman for her hesitation in accepting the position at Saint Lazare; Chupin therefore became a warder under the conviction that her work was to be used for evangelism. During the years she spent in the prison she claimed to have gained acceptance from both staff and prisoners, although it is unclear whether she meant those in her own section or those in the whole institution. She led

⁵¹ As mentioned in Ch. II, Saint Lazare contained all women awaiting trial for any crime or misdemeanour in Paris and the Dept of the Seine, as well as women sentenced to less than two years for criminal offences, and a section for the confinement of "difficult" girls, who were not guilty of any offence under the law. There were prostitutes as well, but only in the Second Section. Mortier appears to have shared the common delusion that all the prison's inmates were prostitutes.

⁵² Typed résumé of Chupin's memoirs, kept at the former Refuge Sainte Anne at Chatillon-sous Bagneux, Paris.

the women in prayer at morning and evening, persuaded them to hear Mass with her on Sundays and won the permission of the authorities for a retreat to be preached inside the prison. Whatever the actual radius of her influence, the power of its presence appears to be confirmed by a small report in the Paris press. On 14 August 1844, under the heading *Faits divers*, the Catholic newspaper, *Le Moniteur*, printed the following account:

Paris: The Prefect of Police authorised the abbe Laroque, apostolic missionary and almoner of the Hotel Royal des Invalides, to preach a retreat in the house of detention of Saint Lazare. Morning and evening the detained women gathered in the chapel in order to hear the warm and touching exhortations which were addressed to them during the ten days of the retreat, and of which they have appreciated the inestimable value.

On this occasion, we believe ourselves obliged to report a fact which deeply impressed those who saw it. On the 9th of this month four women were sentenced to be exposed in public in the Place du Palais de Justice; during the whole time that this punishment lasted, 500 female prisoners were on their knees in the prison chapel, chanting the *Parce, Domine*, and praying for them.

On Sunday, the 11th, Monseigneur Fornari, the Papal Nuncio, said Mass and distributed the Eucharist to 150 female prisoners, afterwards giving Confirmation to 80 of them. A spirit of order and recollection reigned during the whole duration of this retreat.⁵³

A letter that the foundress wrote during the time of her service in Saint Lazare was printed on cards for public distribution by her congregation:

The 10th of July, 1843, to my Jesus, at his Palace.

You know that I have no virtue, it is something proved and recognised long ago, I have not a shadow of it. When a person comes close to me he may say with the most exact truth: Far off she looks like something, near at hand she is nothing. But this discovery which every day becomes clearer to my eyes does not in the least afflict me, on the contrary I am glad of it. I have not anything in myself to lean on, I have not the slightest expectation of help from men in my great weakness. Oh well! You are all the more obliged to be everything to me: strength, consolation, support, counsellor, guide.... You like to work with nothing, never a better chance for you to exercise your power and show your

⁵³ Arch. Préfecture de Police, Série E.B.91. Dossier Saint Lazare.

kindness. My weakness will be then the source of my happiness.⁵⁴

This letter represents a small piece of negative evidence; its tone is not one of anxiety. The writer does not request extra burdens or prepare herself for painful sacrifice.

Some years before the date of the letter Henri Lacordaire, a famous preacher and member of the Dominican order, gave a series of Lenten sermons at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. Chupin may have been one of the thousands who flocked to hear him; Lacordaire may have echoed the conviction of her heart when he preached, in a sermon on Chastity, against that "sense" which he would not allow himself even to name:

All of our body is always more or less in revolt against the soul....[of all the senses] There is one sense which is different....The sense of which I speak...seeks only itself;....it only knows how to destroy; it wears out, it devours our bodily organs and our most noble faculties....it is the enemy of beauty, of life, of kindness, of strength, the universal and national enemy.⁵⁵

Chupin would have had ample experience of what Lacordaire, in the same sermon, went on to call the "victims" of this atrociously despotic sense. Go into any street where misery in rags goes to hide itself, his audience was told, and you will see the pale and withered wrecks of what once were beautiful women, now abandoned by their first seducers. Naturally the celibate friar did not care to use the word "prostitutes".

When a Dominican foundation was made in Paris in 1849, Chupin asked one of the monks, Br. Aussant, to be her director. Claude Langlois, in his authoritative study of female religious orders in nineteenth-century France, considers that to have had a private confessor was the fate of very few, the religious luxury was also a social

⁵⁴ This text was printed on little cards bearing her photograph and circulated after her death.

⁵⁵ *Choix de la Prédication Contemporaine*, Vol.1, pp.32/33.

luxury, "although the religious and social elites did not always exactly co-incide."⁵⁶ It may be that Chupin's director, like Thérèse Rondeau's, appreciated the woman's spiritual potential, or that she was recommended by the well connected ladies in the Faubourg St Germain, who had patronised the Sainte Enfance. Despite the poverty of the foundation which Chupin was to make, it never lacked aristocratic friends or well-wishers.

One of them, Madame de Lamartine, wife of the poet and writer, had opened a "*patronage*", a shelter for some of the ex-prisoners from Saint Lazare in the rue de Vaugirard. Chupin had often gone there in her free time to visit her "old girls". Her memoirs relate that this place deteriorated into a bawdy house, so that she had felt obliged to make a report to the Prefecture. She was given leave of absence for two months (in 1844, as the ledgers show) in order to reform the establishment.⁵⁷ This brief experience made her wonder if the Holy Spirit had given her a vocation for such work.

After the Revolution of 1848 the Constituent Assembly decreed that the interior management of Saint Lazare should be entrusted to the sisters of the Marie-Joseph congregation. Accordingly Chupin became unemployed from the 1st January 1849, but not completely without means, for she was granted a state pension of 500frs a year. Mortier recounts that after she left Saint Lazare the former *surveillante* found herself sought out by some of her former prisoners, who had fallen into destitution. Both her religion and her feelings led her to seek some way to assist them substantially, and being a devout Catholic it was natural for her to seek her director's guidance in this matter. Aussant was at first discouraging, but eventually, faced with her persistence, he gave his approval to her desire to open a refuge. The Freres Prêcheurs appear to have valued Chupin's vocation, probably because comparatively few women undertook such

⁵⁶ Claude Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin; les congrégations françaises a supérieure générale au XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1984, p.270.

⁵⁷ The Patronage Lamartine was taken over by the Marie-Joseph Sisters in 1846.

a ministry. Henri Lacordaire had only recently restored their order to France;⁵⁸ it needed pearls in its crown, to borrow a well-worn metaphor. The Bon Pasteur congregation, supported by the Jesuits, was doing well. Also, a refuge was a rare variety of ornament, and one which the original founder had valued.⁵⁹ In a letter dated 2 June 1850 another Dominican, Monjardet, told Chupin of a house for penitent women which had "just opened" in Laval, and that another was in operation at Bordeaux.⁶⁰ It was suggested that she visit one or the other, to gain knowledge of how such things were run, but apparently she did not do so; she simply began to take young women from the streets into her own apartment. Perhaps she believed that her previous years of experience with prisoners qualified her to run a refuge without the formality of becoming a lay sister, or composing a list of constitutions.

Although the Dominicans were very supportive of Chupin during the humble beginnings of her work, in their eyes the fact that the foundress was only a laywoman gave insufficient stability to the work. She might stay or go at her own discretion and was not canonically bound to obey any of the Fathers whose prestige was linked to that of the house. Mortier admits that Chupin was persuaded, against her will, to conform to the clerically approved image of a woman engaged in redemptive work among the poor. By various pressures, one of which was the threat to refuse consecration of her small chapel, she was made to accept enrolment in the Third Order of St Dominic, then finally in the Second, as a regular nun. The last step took place 1862, but not before the strongwilled foundress had made a journey to Rome to ask the advice of Pius IX! During her visit she also saw Father Jandel, a Frenchman, Master General of the Dominicans.⁶¹ It was he whose arguments smoothed out Chupin's difficulties,

⁵⁸ Dominican foundations were made at Nancy, 1843, Chalais, 1844, Flavigny, 1848 and Paris, 1849.

⁵⁹ As mentioned in Ch.I, in 1214 St Dominic had founded an order of lay sisters to take charge of refuges for penitent women, but the White Ladies, as they were called, did not find favour in France, although they spread to Germany.

⁶⁰ The Misericorde de Laval had in fact been open since November, 1818.

⁶¹ Jandel had replaced Lacordaire as the Prior General, having received a brief from Pius IX

according to Mortier, for "when she saw that the future of her work was menaced, without this necessary transformation, she gave ^way.⁶² In the book this episode is heavily sentimentalised, but it leaves the reader bound to suspect that Chupin was pressured out of her autonomy.

Even after she had taken the veil, both the Dominican fathers and the Archbishop of Paris, through his representative, the canonical superior, appear to have tried to replace Chupin by some other sister who would be more amenable to their control. Three attempts were made, of which the last was successful. The social origins of the Bonne Mere must have strengthened criticism against her. Not only must a foundress be literate, which Chupin was, but she should also possess a certain *savoir-faire* with regard to socio-religious culture only obtained through family and convent upbringing. Langlois found that "the popular classes", either the working class or the *petite bourgeoisie*, furnished only 35% of the total number of foundresses in nineteenth-century France, and that these women were likely to find themselves removed by the bishop in favour of another sister of more acceptable origins, if the congregation rapidly became successful.⁶³ The reverend mother of low antecedents was considered to be out of place at the head of a large congregation, particularly, Langlois suggests, because bishops liked to see the congregation's money handled by someone whose background would have given her a certain expertise in these matters. Chupin certainly had none. The accounts of the foundation were always chaotic, according to Mortier, because neither the Bonne Mere nor her chief assistant, Mlle Lefort, had the ability to keep books. At the end of the month they were sometimes left with enormous inexplicable

enabling him to reform and discipline the order in France and to crush all liberal tendencies within it.

⁶² Mortier, *Bonne Mere*, p.137.

⁶³ Langlois, *Le cath. au féminin*, etc., p.270. Langlois quotes the example of Jeanne Jugan, foundress of Les Petites Sœurs des Pauvres, who had been a hospital nurse and domestic servant before devoting herself to the elderly poor. She survived for only three years as head of her congregation before being relegated by the ecclesiastical superior to a passive and subordinate role for the rest of her long life.

deficits. In any case, they were always living on credit because, although Chupin took all who came, she refused to force her girls to work, or to make them work hard against their will. She said that to do so deprived them of freedom of choice, for "if we make the work unpleasant it forces them to leave". Her admirable slogan was "young souls ought to be governed by a sentiment of honour."⁶⁴

Chupin's life story so far is relevant to the thesis of this essay because of the picture it sketches of an unusual refuge, run by pious women but not under a rigid, mortifying rule. Doubtless Chupin did *not* want her girls to be reminded of a prison when they were in her house, as she knew how little that kind of severity contributed to moral reform. If, in the case of Rondeau one wonders how many cases of mental illness were encouraged rather than cured within her institution after the foundress' recovery, Chupin's experiences raises another question. How many Christian attempts at offering shelter to disgraced girls, in a more humane manner than that prescribed by ecclesiastical tradition, must have failed because of deliberate lack of clerical support, which was so important to secure funds during the difficult beginnings of the enterprise?

Despite their moral frailty, it appears that she did not worry if her penitents left the house, for she was certain that a work of the Holy Spirit had been done in their souls, indeed Mortier quoted her as having written: "How many of them came to me at the end of some retreat or other, to tell me that they were tom to pieces by fear of divine justice...I answered them: My poor children, have confidence! You are very wicked, but *le Bon Dieu is so good!* Have confidence in his mercy. A single act of contrition is enough to win his pardon. And then, what will it matter if you die in prison, in the convent or elsewhere...?"⁶⁵ Does this mean that the girls were discouraged from yielding to melancholy or guilt? Were they encouraged to believe that no matter what

⁶⁴ From *Notice sur l'oeuvre*, undated, possibly early 20th century, from the archives of N.D. de Grace, Chatillon-sous-Bagneux.

⁶⁵*Ibid*, p.176.

they did, God would be there at the end to take them home? The anecdote suggests that Chupin let her girls return to the world without too much difficulty, and that she did not threaten them with hell if they left. If this is true, it makes the Refuge Sainte Anne very different from the majority, and offers another reason for the clergy's dissatisfaction with the foundress. Her biographer continues:

For her, helping her children to die well was the chief aim of her foundation. It was, indeed, saving them for ever....Often she spoke of the joy of seeing her children assured of a holy death. And even when they had left the refuge under a cloud (*en de facheuses conditions*) Bonne Mere enquired about their situation. At the first appeal she rushed to the hospitals, the prisons, anywhere, in order to prepare her lost sheep for a good death.

In his introduction to a brochure written at Chupin's request to gain public support for the Refuge Sainte Anne, Alexandre Dumas called her work admirable, yet believed it absurd, for, he told the foundress, her effort to restrain the ever-increasing prostitution of nineteenth-century France was like trying to bale out a sinking ship with a soup ladle.⁶⁶ She answered that it was worth it, even if they only saved a few.

A nun who, on her own initiative, had sought help from the writer of a profane novel about a prostitute - no wonder that her spiritual masters considered her unsuitable as the head of a regular congregation. She was 73 when the last of the attempts to unseat her succeeded. She spent most of the next decade alone in her room, knitting to pass the time. In 1892 the house received a canonical visit from the Reverend Father Libercier, of the Dominican teaching order, who confirmed the repressive measures taken by her successor with regard to the foundress. After his visit she was forbidden to have any further personal contact with the penitents and was also excluded from the refectory because she did not keep perfect silence while at table.

Such trials purified her soul, according to Mortier, and made it all the more fit to meet her God. Chupin died on 21 April, 1896, aged eighty-three. The isolation of her

⁶⁶ A. Dumas Fils, *Les Madeleines Repenties*, Paris, 1869, p.21.

house was lost as suburban Paris approached and then overtook it. The institute only ceased to be operative about twenty years ago, but the buildings still stand. No visible additions were ever made to them, apart from that of the strong bars over every window opening onto the street. The sisterhood, reduced to a handful of elderly nuns, still owns the former chaplain's house, in which it lives, ownership of the main buildings having passed to the local council.

So much for four of the most outstanding Catholic women who attempted to meet the homeless prostitute's great need of love and redemption. We must now ask what success they had. Were the efforts they made rewarded? Were conversions numerous? Were outcast women and sexually disgraced girls helped into a place in respectable society? If not, what alternative was offered them? Did the underlying pessimism of Christian culture with regard to the destructive power of sexuality on the nature of women who had "given themselves up to debauch", still dominate the quiet enclosures, as it had those of centuries gone by, persuading the women that they were of no earthly use? The next two chapters deal with those questions, beginning with an account of the major congregation in the field, N.D. du Bon Pasteur d'Angers.

Chapter IV - The Revival of Tradition

In France as elsewhere in Europe during the nineteenth century, the sexually disgraced girl who either was a prostitute, or thought to have been one, found little help in dealing with the major problems of her life. If she had a child, there was the foundling hospital; if she had no money there was the brothel, the streets, or clandestine prostitution. Venereal disease was the only one of her misfortunes in which the state was interested. Without a forgiving family or the support of a lover, the girl who wished to avoid or quit prostitution had almost no resource except that provided by Christian charity. Within a refuge, particularly after 1835, when St Marie Euphrasie's congregation spread all over France, such a girl might find a different world: acceptance, disinterested love, shelter, work, a goal, but on terms laid down by Catholic theology and under conditions meant to mortify the flesh. If she could accept help given within these limits, it would be at the price of her adult status and her physical liberty, as well as her mental and emotional growth, for the convent could not offer the normal range of intellectual and sentimental stimulation, although it could facilitate spiritual experiences above the plane of normal existence.

The fact that the state and the Church were willing to permit the foundation of more convent refuges than had ever appeared before in France, were opened in nineteenth-century France, suggests that both authorities were willing to acknowledge the right of disgraced and destitute women and girls to some kind of help. The moral values of French culture were still so linked to religious values, however, that the objects of this help were seen primarily as sinners against God and society. As the regulations on the prostitute's card declare, public women have deliberately "given themselves up to debauchery".¹ As such, the state was willing to have them trained to repress sexual desire. The Church also sought this goal, but for the reason that the women's future in eternity had been compromised by her sexual experience. The treatment given in refuges took its form from moral theology, which was concerned with the problem of

¹See the last paragraph, "Avis Important", of the regulations reproduced at the end of Chapter II.

the indelible stain of sexual sin, a sin which only frequent penance could subdue, but which remained so powerful that women who had once been dirtied by it were liable, like pigs, to surrender to *nostalgie de la boue* if they were let out alone. In that case, the work of salvation would be to do all over again, and indeed only death could end the struggle between good and evil for the woman's soul. Therefore the refuges worked towards the mortal happy ending, nuns and penitents together, shut off from the world outside, a world which was irrelevant to them except as a place of trial or a source of finance. The respectable in Church and society, in as much as they knew what was happening, were content to have it so, although some were ready to believe evil of the convents, blaming them for exploiting the girls whom nevertheless, they did not wish to support from public funds, nor employ in their homes, and for whose psychological damage they had no remedy.²

The Fortunes of the Bon Pasteur - Paris

.After the disbanding of religious houses in the early years of the Revolution there was no provision left at all for prostitutes or disgraced girls who wished to rebuild their shattered respectability, but under the first Empire an attempt was made to revive even this, the least popular form of charity, by the nuns who had practised it under the *ancien régime*. As early as 1806 the little Parisian community of St John Eudes' White Sisters obtained permission to open a refuge from Napoleon, who gave them a building in the rue St Jacques. Madame de Combé's community of the Bon Pasteur had to wait.

After the latter's death in 1692 the house had continued to be run by laywomen, but as time passed it appears that the fervent piety and strictness of the foundress was no longer imitated. Complaints had been made to the Archbishop of Paris, not only with

² In 1842 a penitent at the Bon Pasteur d'Angers jumped from a dormitory window and in landing twisted her ankle. Some of the sisters came and carried her to the infirmary. Persons passing had heard the screams and seen the nuns carrying the girl inside. Local newspapers reported the incident, one of them describing the sisters as "heartless women who tortured the children." The people of the town were excited to a frenzy. The congregation brought a lawsuit against the paper, which published a complete retraction. From *The Secret of the Sanctity of St Mary Euphrasia*, p.196.

regard to the Bon Pasteur, but also to two other refuges in the capital, also run by lay sisters. Mgr de Beaumont therefore requested letters patent from Louis XV, which put all three houses in the care of a religious order,

...the Sisters of the Society of St Thomas de Villeneuve ...who by their institutions and by their religious profession, as much as by the success that they have had in the different parts of the Kingdom where the good of religion and of the state have called them, gave reason to hope that their direction would prove more regular, more disinterested and more advantageous in every respect.³

The sisters had the right of governing the three refuges in perpetuity, although no money was allowed them because, as the earlier letters patent of Louis XIV had stated, "the Bon Pasteur exists by the help of Providence and the work of the girls."⁴ This transaction is an early example of what became general practice in the nineteenth century, when the state relied almost exclusively on religious sisterhoods to run its expanding welfare and female penal institutions. The wording also implies that a religious congregation was the natural ally of the state in controlling the marginalised poor, a relationship that also held true in the nineteenth century, once the first great Revolution had passed away.

In the early years of the Restoration an elderly priest with aristocratic connections, the abbé Legris-Duval, grouped together a number of pious ladies who, in the tradition begun by St Vincent de Paul's Ladies of Charity, visited the prostitutes in La Petite Force and later in the Second Section of Saint Lazare. At first these women had placed any girls who showed signs of repentance with the White Sisters in the rue St Jacques, who accepted them only on payment of a pension of 200fr a year. The prison visitors found this arrangement unsatisfactory, so they supported a request by the Sisters of St Thomas de Villeneuve for a house to be given them in exchange for those they had lost in 1790. Accordingly on 3 November 1820, at a sitting of the General Council of the

³ Pièce no.2, arch. of the Bon Pasteur, convent of the Sisters of St Thomas de Villeneuve, Neuilly, Paris.

⁴ Pièce no. 1, arch. of the Bon Pasteur.

Seine, authorisation was given to the Prefect to acquire in the name and for the benefit of the City of Paris, a house at nos. 83 and 85 rue d'Enfer.⁵ The house was conceded to the Association of Ladies of Charity for the purpose of receiving public women and girls. The Council's reasons for acting in this matter were the same as those expressed in the letters patent given under the *ancien régime* to the old Bon Pasteur, namely that society was sinking into depravity and therefore it was in the general interest "to offer an asylum to those whom shame and repentance and above all pious exhortations could lead back to industry and a peaceful and regular life."⁶ No thought was expressed regarding the possible influence of adverse social conditions on the means of livelihood available to poor women.

The Bon Pasteur in the rue d'Enfer was unusual compared to other nineteenth-century refuges in that authority within it was divided between women of secular and religious life. The Superior General of the congregation was given complete charge of the running and staffing of the house, whereas the President and Ladies' Committee had the responsibility of presenting girls for acceptance as penitents, of controlling the funds of the house and also the right to receive reports on the progress made by their *protégées*. No girl or woman could be dismissed without the Lady President's knowledge. In accordance with Combé's original practice, all penitents were accepted free of charge and entered of their own volition. Whoever wished to do so had first to obtain a letter from the President of the Ladies' Association; this letter would not be given to any woman who was married, pregnant or sick with a contagious disease, the euphemism for syphilis. No girl might enter who had been convicted of crime or theft, or who had not finished serving her sentence at Saint Lazare, or who showed signs of madness. In accordance with tradition the regulations were read out to those who applied for entrance. Each was made to sign a declaration of her desire to enter the refuge, to leave vice and embrace penitence, and that she would be entirely obedient.

5 Hell Street. It was then an aristocratic address, now known as rue Denfert-Rochereau and containing the buildings of several large charitable foundations dating from the nineteenth century.

6 Pièce no. 6, archives of the Bon Pasteur.

No concessions were made to the difference in the culture from which the modern penitents had come, and that obtaining when the refuge was first established. Each girl was told that "the penitence of a daughter of the Good Shepherd consists in assiduous work...coarse food and continual silence, except in recreation." After this her possessions were listed and stored for her. A month later her own clothing was exchanged for the uniform of the refuge, a black woollen dress, black bonnet and veil, a blue apron and a black fichu which the girl received at a special ceremony of acceptance.

Although no mention is made of it in the regulations, it was probably at this point that the girl's hair was cut off, as would have been done in the case of a novice at her clothing ceremony. Henri Gaillac found that many refuges cut off their penitents' hair, a custom which the government disliked, as it marked the girls who left and so was disadvantageous to those looking for work.⁷ Parent-Duchâtelet, when questioning the inmates of the Second Section, had found that fear of this practice was one of the reasons why prostitutes were afraid to enter this refuge. Its retention suggests that the convents did not encourage the girls to re-enter society.

Once accepted into the community, the penitents were forbidden to speak of what had happened to them "in the world"; they must work and live together as a group, calling each other "sister" and being known only by their house name, that of a saint, which would be chosen for them by the Reverend Mother. Their movements and their work were to be regulated by their supervisors only. No presents were to be received and no letters sent or accepted. The penitents might remain until death within the refuge, as long as they were judged to be "sincere".

The statutes admonished the religious sisters to "make it their duty to imitate the Good Shepherd. They will exhaust every method that love suggests to encourage those who are sincerely converted and to lead the most difficult to conversion."⁸ A just severity

⁷ H. Gaillac, *Les maisons de correction, 1830 - 1945*, Ed. Cujas, Paris, 1971, p.115.

⁸ Pièce no. 26, p.7., archives of the Bon Pasteur.

was correct towards the latter - "a little severity and a lot of silence". Penances were to be given sometimes, but only with the Reverend Mother's permission. An interesting regulation is the one concerning solitary confinement as a punishment. Perhaps in view of what had been observed in prison, the writer of the statutes recommends that "when some must be separated from others to ensure order, it is necessary to avoid prolonged solitude, and as much as possible to take steps so as to be able to see them, without their knowledge, while they are confined".

An "observation" written in by Madame la Marquise de Croisy, the first Lady President of the re-opened Bon Pasteur was incorporated as rule 11 of the statutes:

When one is obliged to punish a girl and separate her from the others, care shall be taken that she be not left alone. Experience has shown that prolonged solitude drives them to despair and renders them very guilty.⁹

This instruction appears to be an oblique warning of suicidal tendencies engendered by profound depression resulting from solitary confinement.

In the case of those who would respond neither to gentleness nor severity, the Mother Superior was to inform the ecclesiastical superior and the Lady President.¹⁰ With their approval the girl was then returned to her family or to the friends who had brought her to the refuge, or, in the case of minors coming from St Lazare, to the Secretary General of Police, (who had asked for this to be done) even though the girl had completed her sentence before admission. The writer of the statutes added that, although the latter course seemed hard, it was better than putting the girl out on the street.

Occasionally forgetfulness, deliberate or otherwise, tempered the severity of this rule. The police archives contain a letter dated 16 November 1858, from the Prefect of Police to Madame la Comtesse de Kergolay, President of the Ladies' Association, in

⁹ Originally from Pièce no. 43, modified copy of document no.10. This observation was incorporated as rule 11 in the statutes.

¹⁰ The ecclesiastical superior of a convent was the representative of the local bishop, who had authority to supervise the house on his Grace's behalf.

which he informed her that a girl aged twenty years, sent to the refuge on 8 June 1857, had been arrested for prostitution on the eighth of the month. It was found that she had syphilis. The Prefect complained that he had been unaware that this girl had left the Bon Pasteur. He had already had the honour to remind her ladyship, in January 1856 and July 1856, that minors released into the care of the refuge belonged to their families and to the administration, by law. The same complaint was made in another letter dated 26 November, 1860.¹¹

The President's behaviour with regard to the authorities, although in breach of the rules, reflects one of the observations made in the projected statutes drawn up in 1835, namely that "this house was opened for the detained girls, not for the convenience of the police."¹² It is also a reminder that the ladies in question were used to deference: they came from the ranks of the catholic aristocracy with whom the abbé Legris-Duval had had great influence, not only by reason of his virtues, but by the powerful appeal of his past.¹³ In the regulations regarding the operation of the ladies' committee, the treasurer is directed, in case of difficulty, to seek advice from the distinguished treasurers of the four other charities founded by the same benevolent abbé, namely Mesdames la Baronne de Montmorency, la Comtesse de la Chatre, la Comtesse de Brissac and Madame Swetchine. The latter, a Russian convert to catholicism, conducted a salon which had a very high social status and was at the centre of the "romantic" and ultramontane catholic revival in Paris at that time. She was also a member of the Bon Pasteur committee in 1835, serving with the Marquise de Mortemart (née Montmorency), the Duchesse de la Rochfoucauld, Comtesse Scotte, Comtesse Pitolka and Mmes Meuru, de Trépigini, Mansigni and Rochefeuille. Over forty years later the committee contained only one lady with the *particule noble*. The Ladies'

11 Arch. of Pref. of Police, Paris, series DA.230.

12 Pièce no. 26, Arch. Bon Pasteur.

13 Legris-Duval had been a priest at Versailles before the Revolution. He had offered himself to the Commune as the king's chaplain after sentence of death had been passed on Louis XVI. He was refused but this act of courage nearly caused his arrest. Under the Restoration he was made preacher-in-ordinary to Louis XVIII. Apart from his service at Court he devoted his life to works of charity, refusing several offers of high ecclesiastical position.

Committee always had four male "counsellors" on its board who undertook legal or official business. These were all noblemen, at least until 1845.¹⁴ That such people, educated and with a knowledge of the world, should have supported the subjection of the penitents to the rigid regime of the Bon Pasteur shows that where the religion of a culture declares a taboo, an important area of human life may remain closed to the intellectual ploughing up and seeding represented by free public discussion, even in a nation where that religion is no longer practised by the majority of the population.

In *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* the author expresses the deepest respect for these ladies of charity, whom he believed were more effective in leading the girls in Saint Lazare back to virtue than the prison chaplain.¹⁵ It must have been their support which enabled him to spend time in the refuge in the rue d'Enfer, examining the registers and observing the way in which the house was run. There is no evidence that he was allowed to speak to the penitents, but he asked questions of prostitutes in Saint Lazare who had passed through the Bon Pasteur, as well as of the three ex-prostitutes whom his own charity provided for.¹⁶ His observations covered the period of eleven and a half years from November 1821 to April 1833. They represent the only findings based on archival material obtained in a refuge by a trained observer from secular life in nineteenth-century France.

Parent found that during this period the refuge had admitted only 245 females, mostly between the ages of 18 and 25 years, it being considered virtually useless to try to reform older women. Of these the doctor found that 87 had left voluntarily and 40 had been dismissed for insubordination, in other words just under half had stayed for a very brief period. Of the rest, 26 had been sent to a hospital or asylum, which means that they too may have been merely transitory inmates; five girls had been sent to the St

¹⁴ Their good name impressed the prefect of the Seine, as was noted in a *Mémoire de M.le Préfet de la Seine au Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Paris sur la Répartition du Fonds de Secours entre divers établissements charitables, pour l'année 1845*, Vinchon, Imprimerie de la Préfecture du Dept. de la Seine, Paris, 1845.

¹⁵ Parent-Duchatelet, *De la Prostitution*, Vol.II, P.159

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol.II, p.371.

Michael refuge at their families request,¹⁷ 50 had died and 37 were still in the house at the time of the survey.

These figures show that in the first eleven years the refuge had witnessed a death rate of one in five,¹⁸ of whom Parent found that over half had died within the first three years of residence. Perhaps they had been very sick when admitted, or weak from destitution and bad treatment, or perhaps some psychological factor was present that reduced their will to live. From his examination of the diet provided, Parent concluded that the girls were well fed, although the food was plain. The beds were good, the dormitories well ventilated. Knowing that most of the working class spent at least twelve hours a day at their employment, he was not shocked by the rules regarding work, meals and recreation, in fact he considered the order of the day to be restorative because of what he saw as its gentleness and stability. The women and girls worked a total of nine hours out of a waking life of sixteen hours; they were allowed two separate hours of recreation and two half-hours for washing, dressing and undressing; the remaining five hours were taken up with meals and religious exercises. They were expected to sleep from nine at night until five the next morning. As such a routine is not hostile to physical health, Parent concluded that the reason why few penitents chose to stay for long must lie in the difficulties of adaptation to life in the convent. "Certain persons", probably the lady patronesses, gave him further details. He was told that the health of many girls appeared to undergo a change for the worse as soon as they entered the house, becoming unstable and subject to seasonal fluctuations: "the Spring in particular agitates them". Girls displaying these symptoms also appeared to be mentally unstable, or highly excitable, so that it was necessary to give them gentle treatment for many months. Most of the girls had irregular menstruation on entry, some had none at all. Many whose health showed a reasonless deterioration later succumbed rapidly to

17 The Paris house of the White Sisters was commonly called by this name. It was allowed to retain girls against their will, in a section called "the correction" This facility may have been the reason for the transfer.

18 Parent calls it one in ten, but his interpretation of his findings concerning the refuge is lenient; perhaps he did not wish to see his mistake in this case.

tuberculosis and in fact the doctor was told that it was only those with strong constitutions who could survive the first two years in the Bon Pasteur. He diagnosed what we would call a psychosomatic disorder: the girls fell ill and died because they were deprived of sexual love:

Who does not recognise here the mental torments which agitate these unfortunate girls, indicative of the passion which reigns in them all the stronger because they have known its pleasures and given themselves up to it more impetuously?¹⁹

It is difficult to ascertain if Parent's findings were typical of the refuge's population in later years. A search made in 1985 in the registers for 1840 to 1850 by the sister archivist, showed that the age of entrants during those years was between 16 and 30 years, that some girls were sent back to their parents, some placed (with no indication of what kind of work had been found for them, or if they stayed in it), some given up to the police, many sent to the venereal hospital of Lourcine, two sent to the Salpêtrière (for insanity by that date), one to the Children's Hospital as a nurse and that "many" had died.²⁰ The number of penitents never fell below 48 for the whole ten years, so that it appears as if there were a resident as well as a transient population.

In the Moral and Financial report of the institute for 1858, the figure given for penitents on 1 January is 125, with the addition of 25 girls taken in during the following twelve months. Of these 150 persons, 25 left the refuge for various reasons: two were sent to hospital, five returned to their families, fourteen were placed in work, one was sent away and three died. The picture here seems more promising than that suggested by earlier figures. No girls are reported to have left simply of their own volition, which is surprising. Were the constitutions being interpreted differently? Fourteen girls placed in employment in one year is a very high percentage of the total number, much higher than that of the only other refuge for which we have figures. It may mean that

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.371.

²⁰ See Appendix III at the end of the chapter for the exact wording of the extract given to me. The sister archivist was old and unwell, but she alone had control of the archives and it was kind of her to make the search. I would have wished to do it myself, for the sake of precision, but this was not permitted.

the house was taking more "placeable" girls - perhaps difficult children or girls in moral danger rather than prostitution. It is possible that later in the century the Bon Pasteur, like other institutions described in this study, deliberately sought less recruitment among registered prostitutes and more among those whose experience of vice was less marked.

It certainly appears as if by 1858 the refuge had a large group of permanent penitents in residence, who could resist seasonal fluctuations of mood and whose health had been built up by regular food and rest. It was the steady work of these kind of girls which maintained the financial viability of the enterprise both then and in the twentieth century, for although the house received a small annual grant from the Dept of the Seine, it relied on sewing to cover the bulk of its expenses. It may have been from the 25 new-comers that death or the hospital took their toll in 1858, for it was still the function of the house to receive girls directly from Saint Lazare. In Parent's day they had almost all come from the prison infirmary, and so were already reduced in health, although officially pronounced free of venereal disease. While sick, these girls had been encouraged to listen to the ladies of charity by their fellow prisoners, who knew that they were not strong enough to go back to their old way of life, whereas if a healthy, good-looking girl seemed inclined to repent, she was the butt of her companions' wit until she changed her mind.²¹ This phenomenon was observed by Maxime du Camp fifty years later. He repeated Parent's observation that among the healthy girls the ladies made very few converts, but only persuaded "a few poor little girls, prematurely lost, whom they carry off...and place in those silent houses where one lives beneath a monastic rule."²²

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²¹ *Prost. dans la v. de Paris*, Vol.II, p.373.

²² Maxime du Camp, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 Feb.1887, L'Œuvre des Libérées de Saint-Lazare, p.313.

The Maison du Bon Pasteur survived three revolutions but it did not "swarm" (*essaimer*). Whether or not the penitents entered the Bon Pasteur *faute de mieux* or from a genuine desire to embrace the religious life, it seems that they never did so in numbers large enough to require subsidiary foundations to be made for their reception by the Sisters of St Thomas de Villeneuve. As entrance was voluntary and permission to leave fairly easy to obtain, unlike what the evidence suggests regarding the Bon Pasteur and the two Miséricordes, it is not hard to imagine that the refuge both received and released a steady stream of girls throughout the years, gradually building up a reservoir of "stayers", in whose eyes the severity of the life was compensated for by some other factor. This phenomenon appears in every refuge examined in this study; it is a characteristic which links them all and establishes them as centres of collection rather than of rehabilitation, in the worldly sense. Madame de Combé had never pretended that she was preparing girls for re-entry into society, which was why she had wished all her penitents to hear on entry the rules under which they would be expected to live. No-one was left in ignorance of the austerity of the penitential life, or of the aim of the house, which was to keep the girls inside, dedicated to God and apart. In the eighteenth century this tradition had been gradually allowed to lapse, so that to re-establish it, the authorities had placed the house in the charge of a female religious order, an action which had been considered dangerously new when St John Eudes first did it, but which had acquired credit over a century later. Under the Restoration the old tradition was revived to serve the girls from Saint Lazare who wished to mend their ways. In lending their support to this revival of an ancient method of dealing with sexually disgraced women, the General Council of the Seine had approved its aims, which were to offer asylum to the erring, in order to lead them back to industry and a regular life, but this did not necessarily imply that the penitents were to be adequately prepared for re-entry into respectable society. The traditional method chosen for their rehabilitation was as alien to their way of life as it was to that of the noble ladies who persuaded them to try it. It was obvious that it tended to make lay sisters out of the

penitents, rather than employable servants or craftswomen. It could not be of use to more than a few, those who had a vocation to the religious life or those who had very painful memories of their past experiences. The latter, torn by the wish to go and the fear of leaving, may have been among those whose health took a turn for the worse, who died in the first two years. The others, who knew that they could not adapt to the cloister but yet had some confidence in their powers of survival, had to leave as they had come - still disgraced - to rejoin the only profession open to destitute young women without a reference.

The phenomenon of the revival of the original Maison du Bon Pasteur illustrates clearly both the power of traditional moral theology and the link between police authority and the convent, where the prostitute is concerned. As remarked earlier, the *dames patronesses* saw nothing inappropriate in subjecting girls who had known life in a brothel to disciplines which never compromised with the natural desire for pleasure, even of the simplest kind. A high rate of sickness and mortality in the first two years of life in the house, experienced by girls who seriously tried to adapt to its conditions, was not seen as a symptom of faults in the regime, but as a sign of how deeply the girls' existence had been undermined by "passion". This attitude was supported by the Paris Prefecture, which willingly discharged girls into the care of the Bon Pasteur, according to Parent, because it was considered that the refuge was a material help in the repression of prostitution.²³

The Fortunes of the Bon Pasteur - Angers

The catholic revival in seventeenth-century France had brought about the foundation of two houses for female penitents in the city of Angers, an important trading centre on the confluence of the Maine and the Loire, and the capital of what used to be known as Anjou. The first house, dedicated to St Madeleine, was founded in 1640 for voluntary penitents and those compelled to go there by the local authorities.

²³ *De la Prostitution*, Vol. II, p.3766.

The other house was dedicated to the Bon Pasteur in 1692, taking its name and methods from Combé's Paris foundation, which had sent some of its lay sisters to initiate the work. Only converted women, formerly of disordered life, were accepted there so that they might consecrate themselves to God.²⁴ The dissolution of religious houses brought about in 1790 left the city with no spiritual refuge for disgraced women weary of the world, but under the Restoration, at the same time as the Ladies' Committee Paris were re-opening the original house of the Good Shepherd, certain priests of Angers were looking for support to revive the old angevin foundation. They had no success until 1828, when, by the death of a wealthy noblewoman, the Comtesse de Neuville, the diocese became possessed of a legacy of 30,000fr for the re-establishment of a Maison du Bon Pasteur in their city. Powers said that, although pressed by his clergy, the reigning bishop, Mgr Montault des Isles, shared with many others the fear that a fresh Revolution was brewing, and did not think the times propitious for any new work.²⁵ Later a circumstance occurred which changed his mind. A prostitute born in Angers but then dying in the refuge of the White Sisters at Caen, wrote to Montault des Isles begging him to establish a refuge in the city for poor sinners like herself. Apparently it was the receipt of this letter which decided the bishop, although the question arises of how it could have occurred to such a girl, most probably illiterate, in such extreme circumstances, to think of sending a letter to so exalted a person. The event might perhaps fall under the heading of "*saintes charlataneries*" such as Mlle de Lamourous of Bordeaux believed herself entitled to practise when all else failed. The dying woman may have received the suggestion, passed on by an interested party, that there was something that heaven wished her to do for others who risked dying unaided by the Church.

As soon as the bishop had been won over, five priests of Angers opened a fund to cover the expenses of the proposed refuge. Montault des Isles used the Neuville

²⁴ The Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique gives Angers as the first city outside Paris to have a "*maison du Bon Pasteur*" in the 17th century.

²⁵ Powers, *Redemption*, p.124.

legacy to buy an old cotton mill, plus extensive grounds, on banks of the Maine. He tried to avoid bringing in outsiders to run it, but could find no suitable woman to undertake the work. A fellow citizen, Mme d'Andigné, suggested sending to the refuge of the White Sisters at Tours for help. She knew its young superior well, because she used to lodge there en route from Paris to her estates in Anjou. Unknown to Montault des Isles, Mother Pelletier had for some time wished to extend the apostolic mission of her house:

A dying Magdalen of Tours,²⁶ seeing me enter the infirmary, exclaimed: "Oh, Mother, my best friend, how much you have done for me! I owe my conversion to you. What a consolation it is to see you!"..I had even then a desire to see many Houses of the Order established, and I said to her, "My child, you will probably die soon. If, as I hope, you will have the happiness of going to Heaven, promise me to ask God to let me know whether my desire to found Houses for souls who wish to forsake the path of sin is inspired by Him." "But how can you doubt it? Yes, yes, Mother, leave it to me, I will remember it before Our Lord." Shortly after her death we were called here to found this House of Angers.²⁷

On being invited to make a foundation in Angers, Pelletier agreed that the new house should incorporate the name of the old one - the Bon Pasteur - so as to comply with the terms of the Neuville bequest. It became therefore a foundation of N.D. de Charité - not "du Refuge" but "du Bon Pasteur". The silver medallion that the nuns wore henceforward carried an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd on the front and the Virgin and Child on the back; the images of the Eudist White Sisters and that of the Pastorines were thus combined.

The son and heir of the late countess, Augustin de la Potherie de Neuville, showed interest in the new foundation; in time he became the future mother general's friend, disciple and generous patron of all her works. A celibate who had been educated by the Jesuits at Liège and Stoneyhurst, the count had wished to enter the priesthood, but considered himself unworthy of the honour. Perhaps he felt himself

²⁶ A Magdalen was a penitent formally dedicated to a life of contemplative prayer and severe penances.

²⁷ *Conferences and Instructions of Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier*, 2nd Ed., The Newman Bookshop, Westminster M.D., 1907, p. 389.

stained by some sexual sin of his youth. He certainly showed great interest in the work of reclamation done by Mother Pelletier, becoming increasingly involved in the congregation's development to the point where, having used up almost all his income in its service, he sold the lands from which he derived his title and gave her the proceeds.²⁸

Since the constitutions that Eudes had laid down for Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge required that each house be autonomous, Pelletier left the new foundation in the hands of the five sisters she had brought with her and returned to Tours. The house barely managed to sustain itself, so in May 1831 she was chosen by her chapter to replace the reverend mother of Angers, who in turn took over the post as superior of Tours. The foundress could not begin her new activities until she had been formally released from the authority of the Archbishop of Tours and placed by him under the jurisdiction of Montault des Isles, the Ordinary of Angers. This was perfectly in accord with the tradition of centuries whereby the nun, in the interior life of grace, is accepted as the equal of the male by theologians and canonists, but in the exercise of authority is congenitally inferior, having been made subject to man by the laws of nature, which are presumed to symbolise the laws of God.²⁹



The new house followed Eudes' regulations for the treatment of penitents. The ordering of the penitents' day was basically no different from what it had been in the seventeenth century. Work and religious exercises occupied the time from 5.30 a.m. until 9 or 10 at night, except for the intervals for two meals in the refectory and two periods of recreation, each of one hour.³⁰ The breaking of silence outside times of

²⁸ Powers, *Redemption*, p.147.

²⁹ Jean-Marie Aubert, *La Femme: antiféminisme et christianisme*, Cerf/Desclée, Paris, 1975, pp.69/70.

³⁰ See p. 36 of Ch.I for the daily timetable.

recreation was a punishable offence, except for necessary speech or liturgical song. Special acts of penitence were to be performed on Fridays and during Lent.

The evidence provided by her Conferences and Instructions shows that Pelletier chose not to refer to the disgraced females in her charge as "penitents" or "girls", as John Eudes had done, but invariably referred to them as "children". Thus the subjects were permanently infantilised, for even if they spent the rest of their life in the refuge, their junior status remained unchanged. Punishments, whose frequency and form, decided by the mother superior, were sometimes those suitable for children, such as being made to wear one's nightcap in daytime, or one's dress inside out, sometimes those suitable for a nun: for example, kissing the ground, begging for one's food, the omission of meat from the diet, the recitation of prayers while kneeling in public. Violence was strictly forbidden. Pelletier was adamant that the sisters should never strike the children, and neither should those in authority prefer the arguments of force or verbal abuse to those of reason and maternal kindness. The girls and women were kept in various "classes", groups which never intermingled, even in worship or recreation.³¹

In an *Explanation of the Rules and Constitutions of the Religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd at Angers, taken from ancient manuscripts*,³² it is recommended that those who work with "the children" should be changed regularly in order that friendships might not have time to form, also that penitents and preservatives be kept absolutely separate from those religious sisters not directly concerned with their supervision. The latter might not enter the classes without permission from a mistress or her superior. Even those in charge were forbidden to say goodbye to the children on leaving the class, nor were the girls ever to set foot in the "regular" places (where the

³¹ She designed the chapel of the Mother House in the shape of a cross, whose centre was occupied by the nuns sitting below the altar at the east end, the two arms being used by the various classes and the long aisle by the public, who entered by the west door. The design was used later for all the congregation's chapels.

³² Issued by the Superior General, Mother Mary of St Domitilla Larose, Westminster, 1913, pp.64-68.

sisterhood lived) or to touch or handle anything for the use of the nuns. However sincere their kindness to the children, their mothers were to keep in mind that they were of a higher order of spirituality, and that they should demonstrate this by the quality of their service, even as Christ had said "I am among you as one who serves."³³



A few months after her installation as the new mother superior of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, Pelletier appealed in vain to the various autonomous houses of Our Lady of Charity to send her a nun capable of working as Mistress of Penitents. Meanwhile the number of postulants increased, and so did the number of women and girls the house took in charge, for Pelletier accepted young children put in by sponsors, as well as sexually disgraced females. In February 1833 she accepted an invitation to found a house at Le Mans, on condition that it would be subordinate to her authority. This decision was the expression of her commitment to a change in the organisation of her work. On May 7, 1833, her Chapter put forward the principle of the Generalate, to be called Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers, which would retain control of all foundations made by sisters belonging to it, and whose Mother Superior General would always be the superior of the Angers house, at which all novitiates would be made. This was expressed as number 52 of their original constitutions and sent in draft form to Rome by Montault des Isles, who also published it on September 26 of that year. Constitution 53, allowing the sisters to appoint their own chaplain, was also passed by the Chapter.³⁴ These actions were in response to the new possibilities offered to female congregations by the Holy See in the nineteenth century, and require a few lines of explanation.

In the past there was always an area of tension within the power structure of orders

³³ Luke 22, v. 27.

³⁴ Excerpt from the Chapter Book of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, taken from p.81 of *St Mary Euphrasia, Spirit and Charism*, trans Sr Mary Jacinta Morrison, Peekskill, New York, 1979.

which had made several foundations under the control of a mother general, whose authority was yet subject to that of her diocesan bishop. Rome had usually remained aloof from disputes arising under such conditions, which applied in any case only to a small minority of female orders. In the nineteenth century the position changed dramatically. As Francis Callahan wrote, the end of the French Revolution marked the beginning of a surprisingly rapid development of congregations of simple vows, but France was the centre of and the inspiration for the tremendous growth of this form of religious activity. The revolution had shown the Church the great need for works of charity and zeal among the people. Scarcely a year of the nineteenth century passed without the foundation of a new institute of women with simple vows. Of the 571 congregations established, the great majority began in France.³⁵

In response to this development Rome took the unusual step of granting full approval to female congregations who wished to be united and strengthened by central government, and which would be answerable to a Roman cardinal protector instead of to the various diocesan bishops in which their foundations lay. In 1825 the Society of the Sacred Heart, a teaching order founded by (St) Madeleine Sophie Barat, was the first French female order to benefit from this permission, thanks partly to the support of the Society of Jesus. It may have been this event which encouraged Pelletier to form her own generalate; she certainly copied its mother general in her choice of protectors.

The support she received was a response to various motives, both pious and political. Gregory XVI, who had just struck down the advocates of a new, liberal catholicism in the person of Lamennais and his journal, *l'Avenir*, venerated the teaching of Alphonso Liguori, whom he canonised in 1839. The saint had recommended the foundation of refuges for penitent prostitutes as a counter-weight to the necessity of ecclesiastical toleration of brothels and the trade in flesh. As the congregation of N.D. de Charité du Refuge had made very few foundations since its

35 F.J. Callahan, S.J., *The Centralization of Government in Pontifical Institutes of Women with Simple Vows*, thesis presented to the Faculty of Canon Law at the Gregorian University, Rome, 1945, p.34.

establishment in 1641, its autonomy had obviously not furthered the work for which it had been made. Also, Cardinal Odescalchi, as he told Mother Pelletier, had been praying for some feminine order which would undertake the supervision of prisons for women.³⁶ In particular, although this is not mentioned in the texts, he had jurisdiction over a special prison in Rome for nuns and other women judged by an ecclesiastical tribunal to be guilty of a serious misdemeanour.³⁷ The Jesuits, in the person of Father Anthony Kohlmann, Consulter of the College of Cardinals and of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, had written to Pelletier from Rome, advising her to seek the support of Odescalchi.³⁸ The Society was a good friend to the generalate then and later. It was Kohlmann who was responsible for the "universal" mandate to evangelise incorporated in the papal Brief, because - according to several biographers - he wished to make the Bon Pasteur another Society of Jesus. This surprising information is given flatly, with no explanation regarding the underlying motive. Perhaps one reason was that Saint Ignatius had founded the Roman house of St Martha, a refuge which appears to have been ahead of its time.³⁹ Although it was not allowed to continue long after his death, it had represented a work of mercy dear to his heart. Devotion to the founder alone would have recommended a venture such as Mother Pelletier's to the Society, as well as the fact that she possessed the same far-sighted zeal for souls as they. The two Miséricordes at Laval and Bordeaux, whose foundation was earlier than that of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, also received protection and encouragement from the Jesuit fathers, at least for a time, although their effectiveness never spread over anything like the immense radius covered by Mother Pelletier's generalate by the end of the century.

³⁶ The Sisters of Mary and Joseph were working in prisons in Bordeaux, but their attempt to form a generalate was not made until 1841. The foundress of the order, Anne Quinon, was advised by the Abbé Léonard Petit, a Jesuit.

³⁷ The Holy Cross, in Trastevere; a Bon Pasteur foundation was made there in 1838. The first superior sent by the Mother General had to return to France because of the difficulty of the work. On her arrival in France she asked the Bishop of Marseilles to release her from the vows she had made at Angers. He did so and she joined the White Sisters.

³⁸ Odescalchi entered the Society of Jesus in 1839.

³⁹ See p.30 of Chapter I.

In the realm of the mundane, sponsorship of the Bon Pasteur was a means whereby the Jesuit presence was strengthened in France, then in Europe and eventually overseas, but when commenting on power struggles within the Church, it is not enough to regard them simply as a conflict of interests connected with status and influence. They are conducted between those who sincerely believe that they must gain control of this or that object because thereby a noble cause will be served, or, on a more personal level, some heavenly being dear to the powerseeker may thereby be pleased or vindicated. In his book, *Paris and Rome*, Austin Gough writes that there was a group of neo-Thomist philosophers within the Jesuit Order who began developing a new philosophical method in the 1830's which was designed to arm the Church against liberal thinkers in both theology and politics. Its proponents claimed that ecclesiastical power *must* be centralised in the Church and that Roman jurisdiction had irresistible force.⁴⁰ In the reign of the next pope, Pius IX, Jesuit mariologists were encouraged to find arguments for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, and did so in such a way as to suggest that belief in the mother of God was a remedy against infection by erroneous modern ideas which tended to damage the traditional authority of the Church. All this seems a long way from the creation of a missionary order of nuns who would care for delinquent or debauched women and girls, but there are connections. Certainly the Bon Pasteur generalate was devoted to Mary, but so were all the foundations of St John Eudes, who had been the first to create a liturgy for the worship of her sacred heart. It could also be said that the interior life of any refuge, not only those the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, was based on a rejection of what the papacy was later to define as the errors of the modern era. The existence of the generalate in France, the country of ideas and revolution, was favourable to those at Rome who might wish to spread ultramontane sympathies, not by open argument but by the influence generated by groups of women, devoted to the pope and to Mary, who spent

40 Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: the Gallican church and the Ultramontane campaign, 1848-1853*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, pp. 135,136.

their lives in works of charity thereby relieving the state of the care of some of its most difficult subjects.



As Pelletier's generalate was "of pontifical right" after 1835, ultimate control of it belonged to the Cardinal Protector, yet since Gregory XVI had received many letters of protest regarding its establishment, he delayed the ratification of the authority he had granted until 1844.⁴¹ When Montault des Isles died in 1839, his successor, Mgr Paysant, regarded the Bon Pasteur with favour, but unfortunately his life was cut short by a stroke in 1841. His place was taken the following year by Mgr Angebault,⁴² former vicar-general of Mgr de Hercé of Nantes, a prelate who had actively encouraged Mother Pelletier's work during the last years of Montault des Isles, some of whose episcopal duties he had taken over⁴³.

Angebault was known to be interested in the promotion of catholic charities, and far from being hostile to the formation of female religious orders, he encouraged it, but in return he expected their superiors to submit all decisions to his authority. According to Pierre Branchereau, Angebault wanted "the absolute government and management of the congregation", even down to very small details, especially any regarding finance and the acceptance of postulants.⁴⁴ His work at Nantes had brought him in touch with the local congregation of N.D. de Charité du Refuge, which was hostile to what was seen as the ambition of Mother Pelletier. Angebault had been trained at the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Nantes, and was a gallican by conviction. He had brought with him as his vicar general Henri Bernier, a close friend, soon to be a very active controversialist

⁴¹ The first three Cardinal Protectors were: Odescalchi, 1836-1838; Della Porta, 1839-1841 and Patrizi, 1842-1870.

⁴² Guillaume-Laurent-Louis Angebault, 1790-1869.

⁴³ Before his widowhood, as mayor of Laval, Hercé had given Rondeau all the support he could. This connection is not mentioned by Pelletier's biographers.

⁴⁴ P. Branchereau, *Les congrégations religieuses en Anjou sous l'épiscopat de Mgr Angebault, 1842-1869*, Fac. de Théologie, Univ. Catholique, Angers, 1976, p.65.

of the Sulpician school, and destined to suffer attack and the ruin of his career in the course of the passionate struggle then just beginning between gallican and ultramontanes for the control of the Church in France⁴⁵. Obviously any action of Rome which removed a nun from the power of her bishop was too serious for Angebault to take lightly. He saw the implications on a national level, perhaps better than Mother Pelletier. His hostility towards her, which lasted until her death, was not simply an expression of ecclesiastical male chauvinism, as her biographers would suggest: it was part of his hostility to the desire of the papacy to diminish the traditional independence of the old French Church in order to unite the cult of Rome with the expression of the Christian religion.



One of the major reasons for the Bon Pasteur's growth was the Mother General's ability to think and plan corporately and yet to make her commands in the form of emotional appeals, directed to the heart of each subordinate. She also repeatedly stressed, in her conferences and private letters, that unity was the congregation's strength. Sandreau made a list of her favourite maxims, of which one was "No shadow of difference should exist between our convents."⁴⁶ This unity she obtained by the operation of her own powerful, charismatic, fervent personality on the idealism and religious feeling of the sisters, most of whom met her for the first time in their formative years, when they came to Angers as novices. Up to 1855 all novices in the entire international congregation were trained at Angers, where they came under the influence of the foundress' day-to-day instruction, in the form of what were called *conférences* or *entretiens*:

The first generation of nuns of the Bon Pasteur took care to...gather, from 1838,

⁴⁵ A. Gough, *Paris and Rome*, p.140.

⁴⁶ *The Secret of the Sanctity*, etc., pp. 158/161.

the teaching given verbally by St Marie-Euphrasie to her novices. She never wrote any work of spirituality, nor learned treatise, but over more than 30 years she dispensed to her daughters, both novices and professed, a solid instruction which her auditors gathered up.⁴⁷

These teachings reveal the unity of the Mother General's mind with that of St John Eudes, as well as the importance she placed on the rule of silence, on perfect resignation of the will to that of one's superiors, on the acceptance of suffering and on charity. Among the twenty or more subjects which formed the themes of her conferences over three decades, "obedience" was the most frequently used. By obedience the sisters would obtain divine grace - *grace d'état* - to perform any work, however hard:

Always have blind obedience! Human arguments are insupportable....Perfect obedience, blind obedience!....the Generalate...can exist only by obedience...⁴⁸

The chain of command that she later established within her congregation was based on the perfect obedience which she expected to receive, and which those under her might also exact from all their subordinates. Authority was not to be used destructively or blatantly displayed: rather it was to flow from a high state of Christian spirituality, whose powerful aura compelled submission without open displays of force:

Understand how necessary it is to watch over ourselves that you may not yield to impatience. If you feel irritated or annoyed, you must refrain from giving a reproof...⁴⁹

Others again have a harsh, impatient manner of speaking, raising the voice in reproving, and are far from possessing that gentle suavity and dignity becoming a religious...⁵⁰

⁴⁷ From an article in *Bulletin no. 18 de l'Association des Archivistes de l'église de France*, Summer 1982, by Sr Marie-Anne Cloarec, archivist of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers. The notes made by the nuns fill six boxes in the convent archives, Sr Cloarec wrote. Unfortunately I found that she was not willing to allow anyone but herself to make selections from them.

⁴⁸ *Spirit and charism*, pp.30 and 32.

⁴⁹ *Conferences and Instructions of Reverend Mother Mary of St. Euphrasia, Foundress of the Generalate of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers*, Translation from the French by Miss Ella McMahan. Printed at New York Catholic Protectory, 1888, Ch.LII.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Ch. XLI

It is only possible to win them [the penitents] to God by treating them with the utmost delicacy. In reproving them, never permit yourselves to use unseemly expressions, which will only irritate them. Yes, treat them with that distinguished politeness and courtesy becoming the spouses of Jesus Christ.⁵¹

The delicacy of treatment went hand in hand with an austerity of life expected of both the nuns and their charges. Mother Pelletier's response to the difficulties she was imposing was sympathetic, but uncompromising.

Be very compassionate to these poor souls; they have to do great violence to themselves, and they have many passions to wrest from their hearts. Do you think it is a little thing for them to obey, to keep silence, to work all day?

To keep silence they must do themselves unheard of violence.⁵²

The foundress wanted her institute to provide an environment reflecting love, kindness, gentleness, firmness, quietness, regularity and cleanliness. It is obvious from her Conferences that, along with a high sense of their responsibilities she expected her sisters to cultivate a maternal attitude in their treatment of the penitents.

Have this spirit of charity towards your penitents...imitate the good Superior who spoke to them as to her children, and treated them as such...Therefore love your penitents. We are naturally inclined to love those who love us, and we can thus do more good...Watch how a little child clings to those who take care of it and fondle it. We are all little children on this point.⁵³

The chapter closes with a maxim which reveals that her idea of maternal love was not uninfluenced by considerations of class: "The spirit of our holy Institute is one of charity, condescension and sweetness."

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At the end of 1846 bad harvests brought great distress to the poor in France. The institute was in the middle of a difficult period. Count de Neuville had died in

51 Ibid, Ch. XLIX

52 Ibid, Ch. XXVIII

53 Ibid, Ch.XLII.

December, 1843, and his heirs brought a lawsuit against the Mother General the following year, by which they succeeded in recovering 11,000fr. In 1845, after one of her nuns, Sister Drach, had betrayed the Mother General's Italian correspondence to Angebault, he had sent the Cardinal Protector (Patrizi) a voluminous report on what he called her tyrannical rule, but Rome had not accepted his accusations. Angebault then sent copies of his report to every French bishop in whose diocese there was a house of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, asking for their comments. His campaign harmed the congregation; vocations decreased notably and new foundations became rare in France. In 1846 Mother Pelletier suffered a stroke; the following year her First Assistant died, a friend and benefactor who had supported the work with her annuity of 10,000fr. Poverty and sickness within the daughter foundations brought about the deaths of ten sisters in 1846, 14 in 1847 and 16 more in the following year. Twenty-nine of these deaths were caused by tuberculosis.⁵⁴ The evidence available does not mention the penitents' death rate.

In 1848 six houses of the Bon Pasteur were closed, two of them permanently, as a result of attacks and pillage by the mob. Convents were always unpopular, because they usually gained income by sewing, undercutting the prices asked by women outside, which were already low enough. The dispersed sisters and "children" crowded into the mother house at Angers, almost overwhelming its physical and financial resources.

Despite these checks and reverses, Pelletier's missionary drive did not slacken, but extended itself more widely into Europe and overseas into Africa, India and America. In her, an intense apostolic zeal fuelled by a restless energy fought against reason and financial hardship. The writer of *Spirit and Charism* says that she mentioned her need for money in every letter:

1 January 1845.

...The lack of financial help is my martyrdom. If only I had one hundred

⁵⁴ *The Secret of the Sanctity*, etc., pp.71,72.

thousand francs we could complete the Institute; my soul would be at peace and I think my health would gain a new lease of life. Try to obtain from Our Mother [the virgin is meant here] another Count de Neuville! ⁵⁵

25 February, 1851

....and now, my Divine Heart, won't you allow me the joy of contributing to this work by accepting this little banknote? If my purse contained a thousand francs instead of fifty; you would have it. Ah! how terrible it is to be a mother and to be so poor!

The tone of these letters, which is apparently typical, made sure that the superiors of daughter foundations knew that the congregation's greatest need was financial; whether they ever sacrificed the welfare of those in their charge in order to meet it is discussed in a later chapter, but it is plain that Mother Pelletier's compulsion to "finish the institute" was related to the number of houses that she could found under her universal mandate.

The writer of *Spirit and Charism*, who had access to archival documents, found that Mother Pelletier was frequently attacked because of the rapidity with which she sent out sisters to make foundations. The accusation was that she did so without first ascertaining that there would be sufficient money or public support for the work. Yet there is very little evidence available of the failure of foundations, either through lack of morale or lack of funds. According to Auguste Sandreau, out of 110 foundations made by the congregation before 1868 (the year of Mother Pelletier's death) only three, Le Mans, Clermont and Tripoli, were closed because of internal difficulties.⁵⁶ All mention of new foundations includes mention of financial difficulties, often of physical hardships and sickness, which were overcome because of the self-sacrifice of the sisters, who were not working merely to provide their daily bread. Their loyalty to their Mother General must have been strong. From whence did they obtain emotional refreshment to help them through the years they spent in difficult conditions, what consoling spirituality was placed between their consciousness and the oppressive

⁵⁵ The same, p 99, to Sr M. de la Conception Mortier. The extract that follows is from p. 100 of the book, to Sr M. du Cœur Divin (surname omitted).

⁵⁶ Le Mans seceded from the Bon Pasteur in order to become an autonomous house of N.D. de Charité du Refuge.

regime which they were bound to enforce? Apart from the encouragement given by any positive response from their "children" with regard to their teaching, the comforts of religion must have included that of seeing themselves as members of a spiritual élite, who gave each other honour although the world did not. Corporate fervour was sustained and their successes broadcast by a monthly house bulletin sent out by the *maison mère*. It maintained the state of excitement generated by the foundress with regard to what could be seen as the romance of the work, in which white-robed women with a spotless past placed themselves between the roaring lion of spiritual darkness and the bedraggled stray sheep which it sought to devour.

The following letter sent by Bishop Flaget of Louisville, U.S.A., on August 5, 1841, shows the kind of appeal made to the Mother General, in which great spiritual fruit is promised in return for great labour, a challenge which she could not resist:

Madame

...A new proof that I have not forgotten my dear Good Shepherd associates is my proposal to you, namely to bring a group of your Sisters into my diocese to participate in my ministry in saving a great number of unfortunate girls steeped in all kinds of vices, without hope of a haven to save them from shipwreck.

The bishop went on to explain all the difficulties that there would be in making the foundation: the prostitutes were Protestant or without any religion; English was the only language spoken; the cost of living in America was much higher than in France.

He continued:

...But since my return to my diocese, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have often been the subject of my conversations...One of my missionaries, who has been a parish priest for several years in the most densely populated city of my diocese...is sure that such an establishment, the only one of its kind in the United States, would not fail to be popular, and consequently to be a success. He is sure that the Protestants would be as happy about it as the Catholics and that the public would support it generously...

...we count not less than 1,500 to 2,000 of these lost women in Louisville, out of

a population of 28,000 to 30,000 inhabitants, of whom only 5,000 are Catholic...The Jesuit Fathers have already found a splendid site for a large college and a fine seminary, which they will build next Spring or even earlier...

So, first of all, nothing will be wanting to the Sisters...on the spiritual side, which is the most important point. Secondly, we are sure that as soon as the foundation is in working order, with fifteen or twenty girls, an association of zealous persons will be formed immediately. These will supply plenty of work for the Penitents and provision for their support. Thirdly, if God blesses these first efforts, the charity of the faithful will grow in the same measure and then the Government or the City... will probably take this pious institution under its protection and assure an annuity for it. Fourthly and finally, the first foundation, having BEEN BLESSED BY GOD by the touching conversion of a large number of unfortunate women, I am sure that the Bishops, who now number eighteen, will do all they can to procure similar institutions. Regarding American vocations for these works, which are truly holy yet so distasteful in practice, we believe that God will bless the foundation and provide the means to sustain it and make it grow.⁵⁷

The Mother General accepted the challenge. Despite lack of funds and opposition from Mgr Angebault, she nominated a group for the work in America. The anti-climax came in another letter from Bishop Flaget, regretfully asking for the postponement of the sisters' departure, as the resources he might have put at their disposal were to be used for building a cathedral. At this point Pelletier's zeal banished the arguments of common prudence. Like a daring commander in a military campaign, or one leading a crusade, she relied on the spirit of her troops and the help of Providence. Five sisters left Angers on November 9th 1842 and sailed from Le Havre on the 16th, with no assurance of either lodging or income. The Novitiate Newsletter for November reported:

Sunday, November 8, the eve of departure, we witnessed a touching scene. Our Very Honoured Mother in choir, followed by the members of the Council, then by the professed Sisters, all humbly stooped to our American Sisters and kissed their feet. Looking on, we kept repeating those beautiful words of Isaiah: 'How lovely are the feet of those who announce peace.'⁵⁸

The Council Book, November 16, 1842:

...They left here on the 9th for Paris...It would be impossible to describe here the last moments spent with these dear Sisters for whom we shed all our tears. The thought that we were leaving them, perhaps for ever, was distressing both to

⁵⁷ *Spirit and Charism*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.

them and us. Also, our worthy Mother General, always inspired from above, and strong and generous in the midst of the greatest sacrifices, mustered all her strength, blessed them again and cried out in a strong voice, "My dear daughters, in the name of obedience, Depart! The Cloister door was opened, they rushed out courageously, and we saw them no more."⁵⁹

When the little band arrived in Louisville, Bishop Flaget had pity on them and gave them some financial aid, but their house was poor for years. Nevertheless, a foundation had been made which was eventually successful.

As well as illustrating the challenge which Pelletier saw in her work, Bishop Flaget's letter is an example of a fact very favourable to the growth of her congregation, namely that her houses were seen as fulfilling a need of the state as well as the commands of religion. Although the author of *Spirit and Charism* found that the majority of requests for foundations came from members of the Church hierarchy, in Piedmont, Sicily, Bavaria and Austria, members of the reigning royal family asked the Mother General for sisters who could supervise penal establishments for women. The government of Louis Napoleon did the same, thereby expressing the state's acceptance of conventual discipline as a method suitable for the control and re-education of outcast females. Although Pelletier's methods ensured that this new category of inmates would not mix with any other, the fact that her institute was known to accept them was a deepening of the stigma which residence in a Bon Pasteur undoubtedly gave to the penitents and preserves when they left. It is another indication of the lack of concern which the nuns had for the difficulties of the women's life outside, and suggests that the aim of the Bon Pasteur refuges was to work for the salvation of the inmates, not to equip them for life in the world.

Young offenders

The period between the Restoration and the end of the July Monarchy was time fertile in ideas and actions concerned with social change, in particular those related to education and the prison system in France. Penal reform had already begun in

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.94.

England and Germany, from whence it spread to the United States.⁶⁰ Tocqueville's important work on the American penitentiary system, published in 1833, was only one among the most distinguished of over a hundred publications on penal reform which appeared in France before 1848.⁶¹ There was particular concern with regard to young offenders detained under articles 66 and 67 of the Penal Code, which gave the courts the right to sentence both minors and children under sixteen to periods of detention meant to preserve them from a corrupt environment. The intention of the law was mocked by its application: as there were no special schools or reformatories to receive these young detainees, the period in prison, which could last until the end of their twenty-first year, identified them with the criminal population irretrievably. Eventually in this regard reforms were made, initiated in some cases by the state and in others by private charity with state approval. In addition to the use of old buildings as "*quartiers de correction*", either inside existing prisons or adjacent to them, a second expedient was proposed by the Minister of the Interior, the Count d'Agoult, in a circular of 3 December 1832. This was that young male offenders should be placed within the care of private charities, called "*patronages*", which would undertake to keep them confined but should teach them a trade while under sentence. A third solution, which appealed to those in authority who disliked the drift of the lower classes from the countryside into the increasingly industrialised towns, was the formation of agricultural colonies which taught delinquent boys farming skills. The first and most famous of these was opened in 1839 at Mettray, by F.A. Demetz, a former magistrate and penologist.

With regard to young female offenders, the state was not so innovative, probably because it had far fewer of them than of males in the same age groups. The statistics for prisons and penitentiary establishments published by the Ministry of the Interior

60 The Englishman, John Howard, appears to have been the first to write on the subject of prison reform in *The State of the Prisons*, Warrington, 1777. His third book, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe*, 1789, was translated into French in 1799 as a Memoir for the Ministry of the Interior.

61 Henri Gaillac, *Les maisons de correction, 1830-1945*, ed Cujas, Paris, 1971, p.21. Published for the *Centre de Formation et de recherche de l'éducation surveillée* at Vaucresson.

from 1852 to 1899, and reproduced by Gaillac at the end of chapter four of *Maisons de correction*, show that the total number of girls, including those in private establishments, was at its peak in 1856, with 2,005. In every other year the number was below 2,000. For boys, including those in private care, the lowest number for the same period was 4,037 in 1899. Totals of over 6,000 boys in care per year preponderate in the tables. This great difference must be linked to the fact that a destitute or neglected female child was far more likely than was a male to be able to keep herself by prostitution, and thus remain within the law, particularly if she could prove that she was kept as one man's mistress, or lived under the supervision of a brothel keeper. A destitute boy was far more likely to turn to crime. Gaillac suggests that the female character is particularly difficult to correct, but it was probably their intimate knowledge of the weaknesses of the opposite sex which made the girls so hard to control in institutions run by the state, whose male superintendents found "that the reform of young girls who have acquired bad habits is a kind of chimera which it is useless to pursue." In fact, it was probably their intimate knowledge of men's sexual appetites which made the girls so disrespectful towards the authority of the male superintendents.⁶²

Up to 1880 there were no state reformatories in France for delinquent girls or those in moral danger. In the latter half of the nineteenth century their supervision was taken away from the prisons for adult offenders and entrusted almost exclusively to female religious orders. Of these, six depended from the Bon Pasteur generalate, three were attached to the Marie Joseph Sisters and eleven others were single, autonomous houses, one of which was Protestant and one Jewish.⁶³

In 1848 the acquisition of land and farm buildings adjoining the mother house led her to consider the experiment of making an agricultural colony for girls, the first in France, and possibly modelled on the one opened by the superior of her Munich

⁶² Tocqueville, quoted approvingly by Gaillac, *op.cit*, p.117.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.117.

foundation. Her initiative was reinforced by a new law of August 1850, which offered favourable conditions to congregations who would accept ministerial supervision.⁶⁴ The state paid sixty centimes a day for every child entrusted by it to the congregation.⁶⁵ The value of the work done by the child after she had received some training belonged to the house. This might represent a considerable sum over the years, although the published histories of the generalate do not mention this. Officially opened on 2 December 1852, the colony of Nazareth had already received its first girls from the "corrections" of the departmental prisons in June of that year. This was also the year in which the generalate was recognised as a legal personality by a decree of Louis Napoleon, signed on 13 September 1852, which entitled it to receive bequests, to make purchases or sales directly, and to be taxed at a lower rate than unauthorised houses. The latter were compelled to transact legal business or accept gifts in the name of one of their members, which could lead to complications. In return for its new status the generalate had to submit to some administrative control and to satisfy the authorities that it had a reasonable amount of capital funds. Gaillac says that the state found all convent refuges "eager for subsidies but savagely jealous of their liberty."⁶⁶ Only a small percentage of them were willing to accept official administration in return for the legal status of a penitential colony. Of these the Bon Pasteur d'Angers was the largest; five other houses attached to its generalate accepted the ministerial provisions, but without offering agricultural training. This state of affairs ended with the decrees of laïcisation of 1885, whereby juvenile offenders put in by the state under sections 66 and 67 of the Penal Code were removed from the care of religious houses.

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64 The constitutions of the generalate had always allowed provision for the superior to accept the direction of a house of correction for females, as this had been foreseen by St John Eudes as a service which might be required by those in authority in return for toleration of what was then a radically new order.

65 Emile Keller, *Les Congrégations religieuses*, Poussièlue Frères, Paris, 1880, p.35.

66 *Les maisons de correction*, etc., p.113.

The female religious who made the Bon Pasteur's enormous work of charity possible were at first predominantly French, but after 1849 women from elsewhere in Europe and overseas replaced the great influx of local girls which had come to Angers in the early years. Between the foundation in 1829 and the legal recognition of the congregation in 1852 the mother house received 1448 postulants.⁶⁷ Of these 1169 were Frenchwomen and 279 foreigners. Over 500 came from the department of Maine et Loire, in which the *maison mère* is situated. Only 12 came from the department of the Seine.⁶⁸ The years 1830 to 1840 saw a very big entry of postulants and a large number of exits, suggesting that the mother house had taken all who came without making a considered judgment. Yet apart from this period the exits were comparatively few. In any case, many of those who left were not lost to religion but entered other congregations, mostly convents of the Eudist order of N. D. de Charité du Refuge.⁶⁹

By 1854 the Bon Pasteur generalate comprised 54 houses, an enormous increase, averaging over two new foundations a year since 1829. Thirty of these were in France and 24 in Europe, all under the personal supervision of the Mother General. Because the noviciate was still conducted at Angers, some postulants had to make enormous journeys. Correspondence, all in the hands of Pelletier, sometimes took place at

67 By law a postulate of at least six months was required for those joining female congregations with perpetual vows. In congregations "of simple vows", like the Bon Pasteur, the period was left to the judgment of the superior. Girls deemed suitable to take the veil must be at least 15 years old at the time of the ceremony. The period of the novitiate was, by canon law, one year but it is obvious from the speed at which some nineteenth-century congregations sent out nuns to new foundations that this rule was not kept.

68 These figures come from notes taken by me during an "intervention" by Sr Noeline McEvoy of the Congregation of N.D. de Charité du Bon Pasteur (d'Angers), before Professor Claude Langlois on 7.6.85 in Paris.

69 This may be one of the reasons why the original congregation of the White Sisters also grew in number during the second half of the century. The élan given to the movement to care for dishonoured girls and women by Mother Pelletier's powerful congregation may have drawn the related order along with it. They made few new foundations before 1833; most of their work was done in North America after 1850. Apart from the revived foundations of Caen, Rennes, Tours, La Rochelle and Paris, their French houses were: Versailles, 1804; Saint Briec (replacing Vannes and Guingamp) 1808; Nantes, 1809; Lyon, 1811; Valence, 1819; Toulouse, 1822; Le Mans, 1833; Blois, 1836; Montauban, 1836; Marseille, 1838 and 1864; Besançon, 1839; Valognes, 1868.

intervals of many months. Bishops often waited six months for replies to their letters concerning houses of the Bon Pasteur in their respective dioceses. Power to appoint superiors of daughter houses still remained centralised. Their triennials of office might be interrupted as the Mother General saw fit, indeed she frequently changed the staff of individual houses.⁷⁰

In 1854 the Congregation of Propaganda Fide which protected and subsidised the Bon Pasteur's foreign houses, suggested that Mother Pelletier divide her kingdom into provinces, whose superiors would be autonomous in matters of all but the greatest importance, and thus able to train their own novices. The division took place in 1855; Angebault was appointed apostolic visitor to the congregation and used the opportunity this gave him to interview in private all the professed sisters at the mother house, subsequently compiling a long report for Rome. It was of such a serious nature that, although it came from a convinced gallican, Pius IX decided to order an "inquisition" by the Holy Office into the affairs of the two Bon Pasteur foundations in Rome, the Santa Croce and the Laetana⁷¹ The only accusations which the Mother General's biographers mention as having been made by Angebault were those of tyranny over her religious subordinates and inefficiency in her organisation⁷². In the event the findings of the Holy Office were in her favour.

On the Mother General's death in April, 1868, the order had 2,067 professed sisters, 384 novices, 309 *tourière* sisters,⁷³ 962 Magdalens, 6,372 penitents and 8,483 children, both preservates and those given into care by the state. She had founded 110 convents, grouped within fifteen provinces established in France, Belgium, Holland, Rome, Italy, Germany, Austria, England, Scotland, Ireland, Asia, Africa, Canada, the

70 Her commands were simple, direct, fervent: "Read this on your knees and go, in the name of holy obedience!"

71 This foundation had been requested by Rome and was for the reception of unmarried mothers.

72 Although it would be fascinating to know what Mgr Angebault accused the reverent mother of doing, I did not even try to find out for fear of turning the thesis into a by-path from which it would never emerge.

73 Sisters at the bottom of the hierarchy who did menial tasks, such as gate-keeping, in which they had to have some contact with the outside world

U.S.A. and Chile.

Her successor was Mother Marie de St Pierre Coudenhove, under whose leadership the rate of expansion exceeded even that accomplished by Pelletier. In the next twenty-four years eighty-five new houses were founded, mostly overseas, making thirteen new provinces, including that of Oceania which contains Australia.

The third Mother General was Sr Marie de Ste Marine Verger, who took office in 1892. She had to weather the storm of violent unpopularity which broke upon the congregation's head at the time of the "scandal of the Bon Pasteur" in 1899, when a house of the order was charged with the exploitation of the labour force represented by the girls and women in its care.⁷⁴ Already an elderly woman at the time of her election, Mother Ste Marine Verger died in May 1905.

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The rapid growth and international expansion of the Bon Pasteur generalate during the nineteenth century was not reproduced in the history of any other congregation doing refuge work, that is to say occupied in the care of women and girls whose misfortunes were linked to sexual disgrace. Its nearest rival was the congregation of N.D. de Charité du Refuge, whose expansion seems almost to have been a part of the generalate's development, as the two orders were so similar to one another that the smaller congregation must have benefitted from the prestige of the larger. A bishop, particularly a gallican bishop, who admired the work done by the Bon Pasteur may still have preferred to invite the White Sisters into his diocese, because their autonomous house would be entirely within his jurisdiction.

Having accepted the Bon Pasteur's efficient organisation and the outstanding qualities of its Mother General as contributing to its success, it is still surprising that this particular order should have grown so great. Although the foundress impressed on

⁷⁴ This event is discussed in Chapter IX.

her novices that they did not do "any new thing", it is obvious that the success of the generalate was not solely dependent on its provision for the conversion of prostitutes. There is no evidence in any nineteenth-century document dealing with prostitution in France that the refuges were attractive to more than a very few of "the lost sisterhood" which they were originally created to serve. A recent study carried out by Dr Jacques Termeau into the departmental and police archives for the last century in Mayenne, Sarthe and Maine et Loire brought to light only negative evidence: hardly any mention appears of a registered prostitute applying for entry to a refuge, although the mother house of the Bon Pasteur generalate is in that area.⁷⁵

The accounts of Gaillac and Joly suggest that one of the main reasons for the difference in size between the generalate and other congregations lay in the interpretation given by Mother Pelletier to the permission to act as custodians, in the name of charity, which St John Eudes had written into the constitutions of the first refuge founded by him at Caen. In France under the *ancien régime* it was traditional to use the refuge as a place of discipline or sequestration for offending females subject to paternal authority. This explains why the superior of the first Eudist house at Caen was permitted to undertake the control of houses of correction, if requested to do so, although she was not commanded to open any new ones. This permission justified the work initiated by Pelletier in 1833, when, anxious to earn money for the Angers house, and to extend the field of its evangelism, she made what Gabriel Powers called "a stroke of genius" by opening a small "preservates" class for orphans and young children in moral danger whose sponsors paid a lump sum when committing them into care. Taking in very young children was not new: the Miséricordes of Bordeaux and Laval accepted them. What was innovative was the size to which the preservates class was allowed to grow. It is obvious from the figures quoted by Joly in the *La Réforme*

⁷⁵ Termeau, Jacques, *La prostitution et la vénalité sexuelle dans le centre-ouest de la France au temps du règlementarisme*, Thèse de 3e cycle, Université du Tours, 1985, Chap. II, *Les prostituées et le repentir*. An abridged version of this work was published by Les éditions Cénomane, Le Mans, 1986, as *Maisons closes de province*.

Social (discussed in the following chapter) that at the end of the century the preservatives formed the bulk of the order's subject population internationally,⁷⁶ and together with the *grande classe* (for penitents) represented a contained mass of unwanted, morally or psychologically damaged females which the authorities might think themselves lucky to be rid of so cheaply. The fact that the Bon Pasteur sisters attempted to convert the girls to Christianity might be seen as an added bonus.

In countries outside France the Bon Pasteur operated its houses as penal institutions if requested to do so, as well as taking in repentant women rescued from vice, children in moral danger and orphans. Expressed in its own terms, the work of the generalate put at public disposal centres of trained personnel whose aim was to pour healing balm into society's secret wounds; to turn brutalised, exploited, neglected girls and women into docile, disciplined members of a self-supporting community united in the pursuit of spiritual perfection, and whose presence would never trouble the world outside again.⁷⁷ Its success in maintaining so many houses for the kind of work that most religious orders did not care for was not only because it ministered to a need, but because it benefitted from the tremendous impetus given to it by the fervour of its foundress. Mother Pelletier was one of those rare human beings who are continuously subject to what William James called "the higher excitabilities", whose prime gift is nerve; a woman who lived in the religious centre of her personal energy, actuated solely by spiritual enthusiasms, and able most powerfully to transmit her ideas on the wavelength of those hundreds of receivers which were her nuns. She was one of those nineteenth-century mothers superior who estimated correctly the strength and idealism of her young novices, the limits to which she could push their endurance in the name of holy obedience, and for the sake of what they saw as the service of God and society.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ In his brochure, *Les Maisons du Bon-Pasteur* (1903) Joly gave a figure of 19,039 Magdalens and penitents and 23,506 preservatives.

⁷⁷ In her *Practical Rules for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes*, Mother Mary of St Marine Verger wrote "The greater number of our children we know desire to return to the world....We should then make every effort to induce them to remain in the asylum opened to them by Divine Providence, where they are assured of the grace of a happy death". Cf *Practical Rules*, Angers, 1897, p.182.

⁷⁸ In the last half of the twentieth century the congregation of N.D. du Charité du Bon Pasteur has

suffered the same lack of vocations as other religious communities. In 1986 it had 585 houses containing 6,428 professed but only 80 postulants and 152 novices.

Chapter V - Three Nineteenth-Century Foundations

One of the aims of the previous chapter was to describe the interior life of convent refuges in nineteenth-century France, by examining the congregation of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, whose foundations outnumbered those made by any other sisterhood concerned with sexually disgraced women. Such was the uniformity of government demanded by the foundress, that to know what went on in one Bon Pasteur house is to know a great deal about the life of all.

With regard to the internal organisation of the houses governed by Lamourous, Rondeau and Chupin clerical pressure ensured great uniformity of response to the needs of the penitents, needs which Catholic moral theology had identified and explained. The brief accounts that follow constitute evidence of a negative kind, namely how little these different women's background, temperament and experience of life had been able to affect the nature of the work they did, because they did it for the Church.

The Miséricorde de Bordeaux - founded 1 January, 1800

The unpublished biographer of Mlle de Lamourous, the abbé Guitraud, found that his heroine had some knowledge of past methods outside the Eudist tradition. Her senior assistant was a former lay sister of the Madeleines de Bordeaux, a refuge founded in 1641 by Olive de Lestonnac and modelled on the convent of the same name opened in Paris in 1618. Destined for voluntary penitents only, in time it imitated its Parisian namesake by opening a *quartier de force* for women put in by order of the local parliament, or by *lettres de cachet*. There were fifteen women living in captivity there in 1777.¹ There was also a Bon Pasteur in Bordeaux before the Revolution, an autonomous house opened in imitation of Combé's original Paris foundation, and run by women who were known as "Pastorines". Guitraud found that as late as 1745 the

¹ R. Guitraud, *Mlle de Lamourous et la Miséricorde*, 2 vols. unpublished, p.222. This document was offered to the Congregation of the Miséricorde by its author, who was chaplain to a daughter house at Libourne outside Bordeaux, in the sixties.

house was still described as a convent for "girls' who, after having lived in disorder, retire to it in order to do penance of their own free will...and virtuous women...who shut themselves up with the penitents in order to conduct them." Three sisters and one penitent from this house were guillotined for their religious beliefs during the Terror. Guitraud also believed that Lamourous' long acquaintance with certain of the Jesuit fathers stationed in Bordeaux would have brought to her knowledge St Ignatius' House of St Martha, founded in 1542 in Rome, and which was open only to voluntary penitents.² It appears from all this that she had information available to help her evaluate the worth of involuntary penitence where religious conversion was concerned. Her subsequent decision never to accept unwilling subjects was not new, but her ability to stick to that decision was. It showed a certain emancipation from seventeenth-century theology, under the influence of which Eudes had accepted that conversion maintained by physical restraint was preferable to liberty and apostasy.

Lamourous had credit with the Bordeaux clergy, and thus with the pious among the moneyed classes. Once the archbishop had appointed her spiritual director, Joseph Chaminade as the canonical superior of her house, he was able to recruit "lady patronesses" whose gifts provided sufficient income for Lamourous to rent successively larger premises. Eventually he persuaded her to buy on credit a former convent in the centre of Bordeaux. Chaminade, obviously acquainted with practices within the Eudist houses, also required all the staff to wear a medal similar to that worn by the White Sisters: a heart-shaped silver pendant bearing an image of the Virgin, bordered with roses and lilies. This may be an indication that he wished the house to resemble the Eudists in the generation of autonomous foundations, indeed his acceptance of Thérèse Rondeau's vocation supports this, but the scrupulous, self-doubting nature of Lamourous was an insurmountable obstacle.

One mark of this characteristic was the Bonne Mère's conviction that her regulations were not quite good enough: she was always amending them. She also

² See p. 30 of Chapter I.

wrote commentaries upon the activities proper to each section of the penitents' day, in order to teach the girls the significance of their religious exercises. In a manuscript, *Avis de la Bonne Mère à ses Filles*, Lamourous collected her instructions, which were read out to the inmates of the house from time to time. She also composed a *Traité des Règles* in which she described the different duties assigned to the girls and the spirit in which these were to be done. It appears from this treatise that she was willing to trust her penitents. As well as acting as gardeners, sweepers, cooks, nurses and kitchen aides, some were given the work of doorkeepers, porters and *commissionnaires* or errand-girls, duties which among the White Sisters were carried out only by nuns of the *tourière* class. When performing them the girls exchanged their black caps for the white cap of a lay sister. The treatise prescribed for them the correct response to certain eventualities, such as being spoken to in the street, invited inside homes, given presents or asked to take messages to girls inside.³ This last was strictly forbidden. Lamourous was understandably sensitive to the image the public had of her house. For instance the *Règle des Portanières* fills twelve manuscript pages and covers every aspect of the work. Humility, discretion, obedience, taciturnity were to be the watchwords of these women when "outside". Although the author's tone was necessarily authoritarian, considering her own background and the age in which she lived, the care she took to explain the rules is a sign of a spirit which valued reason: her subordinates were not expected to obey blindly. Regularly after each "job description" the treatise reminds the penitents that if they had any difficulties with their work, they should seek their Good Mother's advice. In particular she admonished them to come forward "with simplicity" and report to her any infringement of the rules committed by themselves or any of their companions. The numerous repetitions of this last instruction throughout the treatise suggest to modern minds that the community was meant to be riddled with spies and tell-tales. The great fear that moral corruption would gain a foothold in the house is related to the extreme distrust in which the sexually inexperienced executive staff held

³*Traité, etc, Règle des Portanières*, Arch. M^s. de Bx at Pian-Médoc.

the girls, many of whom remained, in the opinion of their confessor, totally unregenerate even after a residence of many months.⁴

The generosity and moral courage of Lamourous which had led her to open the Miséricorde went hand in hand with fear and doubt, doubt that she was acting correctly, fear that God might not be satisfied with her work. Only girls who had Proved themselves genuinely pious over a period of time were given an opportunity to rise a step in the internal hierarchy, when, in order to supplement her small number of lay sisters, the foundress promoted supervisors from the penitent body. Such girls were called "*surveillantes*" rather than "*directrices*", a title reserved for those who entered the house directly in response to a religious vocation. This does not mean that the *surveillantes* were not simply aides: each class of penitents, averaging thirty members, had one of them as its under-mistress, and she was the head of the class council, a body formed from the senior girls. Each council met weekly, its chief duty being to discuss the allotment of work, but also to make a list of any girls within the class considered dangerous to the spiritual welfare of the whole. Council members had a special responsibility to pray for and watch such girls.⁵ Thus, while inviting the girls to share in the responsibility for each others' salvation, an action which is essentially generous, they were being directed to see any unacceptable response from a particular girl as an effect of her sinfulness, rather than as a fault in the treatment she received in the refuge.

Lamourous and Chaminade made it the object of the institute to receive all "female sinners" without charge, and to keep them as long as they wished to stay, with the result that although after 1815 the peace brought a measure of financial stability to the refuge, the house was never rich. It could not be so while constantly accepting untrained women who might leave whether or not they had repaid the cost of their keep by the work they learned to do.

⁴ Chaminade to Rondeau, 17 March 1841, from typed copy of a letter in the possession of the Miséricorde de Laval.

⁵ Arch.Mis.Bx, *Traité des règles, lère partie*. No page numbers.

The aim of the house was redemptive, in the theological sense of the word. Rehabilitation, as it is understood today, was only peripheral to the work of salvation. Contact between the lay sisters and their penitents was meant to be constant, so as to encourage conversion. Lamourous and her assistants followed the same routine as the penitents; they ate and slept among them and were dressed almost identically, in black or dark blue with a large widow's cap, black for the girls, white for the sister. The penitents were allowed to address questions to the Bonne Mere, either verbally or by means of notes forwarded by their class mothers. According to Guitraud the establishment remained faithful to the ideal of near equality between staff and penitents into the twentieth century.

Despite the principle of liberty to enter and liberty to leave, once a girl had agreed to stay every moment of her day was under the control of the *Règlement*, the set of rules for everyday conduct which Lamourous considered to be the instrument of sanctification for everyone in her house:

Fidelity to the rules and customs, my dear daughters, fidelity...Strive to take in the absolute necessity of faithfulness to the rules. For being the expression of the will of God, it is our own will that we prefer to his when we disobey them. Then trouble replaces peace in the soul, grace withdraws, the demon and his temptations advance with long strides; darkness replaces light.⁶

Work, prayer, song and a comparatively mild rule of silence were the main ingredients in this recipe for making good Christians out of "disorderly" girls and maintaining the spiritual life of their faithful directresses. That the rules were the same for all is another of the few outstanding differences between the Miséricorde of Bordeaux and the houses based on the Eudist tradition. Neither did Lamourous or Rondeau (who followed her directions in everything) institute a separate "reparatory" order of penitents whose penances were designed to be noticeably more severe than those of the others.

⁶ *Avis de la Bonne Mère à ses Filles*, Arch.Mis.Bx p.5.

Timetable of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux for each class⁷

Rise at 6 a.m. Angelus and Ave Maria sung while dressing.

Those who finished first waited on their knees in silence and then all went to the oratory, two by two, according to a set order of precedence which never varied. This order was kept for all group movements in the house and also determined seating in oratory and refectory. This practice ensured that once a penitent was put into a group - *la classe* - she would never mix with any girls outside it, however long she stayed.

In the oratory vocal prayer and responses were followed by a set meditation, read out point by point at intervals of seven or eight minutes, to give time for reflection. This took half an hour. A short verbal invocation to the hearts of Jesus and Mary followed.

- 7.30 a.m. Mass, followed by thanksgiving.
- 8.00 a.m. Breakfast, during which quiet speech was permitted.
- 8.30 a.m. Work commenced by prayer. Liberty to talk until 9 a.m.
- 9.00 a.m. The mistress of each group reminded them of the presence of God, and made an ejaculatory prayer to the heart of Jesus which she repeated hourly.
- 10.00 a.m. *Ave maris stella* sung; freedom to speak until 10.30 a.m.
- 10.30 a.m. *Veni creator* recited. Saying of the rosary, with acts of faith, love and contrition replacing the aves. Catechism, religious instruction - replaced in later years by a reading from the Gospels - continued until 11.30 a.m.
- 11.30 a.m. Liberty to speak until 12.00 noon.
- 12.00 a.m. All proceed to refectory, reciting the litanies of providence. Dinner eaten in silence while listening to reading.
- 12.45 - 2.00 p.m. Return to the oratory to give thanks. Recreation until 2.00 p.m. No private conversations allowed.
- 2.00 p.m. The rosary and a prayer. Work recommences. Liberty to speak until 4.00 p.m.
- 4.00 p.m. The *Magnificat* is sung. Silence until 5.00 p.m.
- 5.00 p.m. Prayers for the Association of the Sacred Heart, founded by Chaminade. Liberty to speak until 6.30 p.m.
- 6.30 p.m. Catechism, sacred reading or religious instruction until 7.30 p.m.
- 7.30 p.m. Silence for three quarters of an hour, then procession to the

⁷ This may also be taken as a timetable for the Miséricorde de Laval.

oratory to adore the Sacrament and say the *angelus* .

8.00 p.m. Supper while listening to reading.

8.30 - 9.30 p.m.. Recreation.

9.30 p.m. Process to the oratory for prayers. The *Miserere* is then recited by all, with the arms crossed or while lying prostrate on the ground. The directress sprinkles all with holy water and all retire in silence to the dormitory.

While undressing, verses of a canticle are sung, relating to death, the horror of the tomb, or judgment.

On Sundays there were six recreations and all religious exercises took place in chapel.

The plan of the day above appears in Verrier's *Positio*, and is a résumé prepared by him; from the archives of the house. It is very similar to the regime prescribed by St John Eudes for the penitents taken in by his congregation.⁸ Although work is mentioned only twice, it is understood that it continued at all times, where possible. The liberty to speak, amounting to five hours, is generous compared to that given inside the Eudist houses or those based on Combé's Bon Pasteur. Lamourous chose the prayers and canticles with care: she attached great importance to the texts, believing that they would exert a purifying influence on the thoughts and feelings of the girls. Every hour was marked by a religious exercise and the different classes sang as they worked or processed to and from chapel, refectory, courtyards and dormitories. According to Guitraud, the psalms and hymns they used were set to pleasing tunes, composed in earlier times "to charm the hours of leisure or of work among the devout."⁹ The fervent renewal of religious feeling which followed the Terror in Bordeaux had brought this music into fashion; its touching melodies, allied to simple yet elegant verses in the vernacular (some written by Fénelon or Racine) were used everywhere, particularly at low mass. Lamourous found them an excellent vehicle for her work of conversion.

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⁸ See p. 36 of Ch.I.

⁹ Guitraud, *Mlle de L.* etc., Vol 1, p.181.

Although the foundress of the Miséricorde was personally popular in Bordeaux, her enterprise was not completely acceptable to the state. Before 1805 the institution had had no official contact with the civil authorities. The foundress had never been forced to ask for a permit from either the prefect or the diocesan bishop, who had given her "public and private marks of their protection and benevolence."¹⁰ However, when the state was carrying out the enquiry which preceded the decree of 26 December 1810, Lamourous was denied attendance at a general chapter of the heads of female congregations held in Paris from 30 November to 2 December 1807, because she would not accept in advance any alteration to her power to retain or release penitents as she thought fit. She was also refused permission to use one of the unoccupied buildings belonging to the state in Bordeaux. Chaminade encouraged her to ignore this disappointment; as mentioned earlier, with his approval she purchased a former convent of the Annonciades in the centre of the city, mortgaging her vineyards at Pian to raise the required one fifth of the price in cash. In 1808 Napoleon spent a week in Bordeaux to "reanimate" the port, ruined by the Continental Blocade, and during that time one of his ministers, Count Hugues Maret, made a tour of charitable institutes during which he was invited to inspect the Miséricorde. Moved to pity by the wretched conditions in which the women were living and charmed by the Bonne Mère's gracious welcome, he secured her a large grant for repairs. The state also took responsibility for the purchase price of the convent and refunded Lamourous' deposit. Maret secured provisional official recognition for the house and the foundress was ordered to send her statutes to the Conseil d'Etat for approval. She did so, but they were denied official approbation because they incorporated what Chaminade and Lamourous called the "fundamental charter", namely that the authority of the bishop alone should limit the conduct of the mother superior inside the house, and that those girls and women who entered it should conserve the liberty to leave it: "only the desire to become virtuous

¹⁰ Ibid.

shall retain them."¹¹ This decision cost Lamourous any further subsidies. She made another attempt to gain recognition on her terms when she was in Paris in 1813, but with no better success.

The registers of her house for its first 40 years of existence are so rich a source of data that they are discussed separately in Chapter VIII. The findings are similar to those suggested by the figures given for the *Miséricorde de Laval*, namely that the house both received and lost subjects continually throughout the year, slowly building a population of long-term stayers. Very few months passed without a least one death.

After the death of the foundress in 1836 one other *miséricorde* was successfully founded the following year at Libourne by her niece and successor, Laure de Labordère, who later accepted the direction of another at Cahors (1839) which had been independently founded. In accordance with the religious spirit of the nineteenth century, the sisters eventually gave up their lay status. The religious constitutions of the house were formally approved by Cardinal Donnet on 20 April, 1855, when the congregation became a community of regular nuns. Legal recognition was not requested until 1872, when it was granted without the imposition of state control. Until that date the congregation had been categorised as merely "une association tolérée".

Mademoiselle de Lamourous was an unusually courageous woman with a gift for making friends and a strong need to love, but was her house very much unlike the old refuges based on Combé's Bon Pasteur, or those run by the White Sisters? The larger permission to speak and the use of penitents as door-keepers and messengers outside the walls was certainly different, and suggests a community in which the subjects were treated with more humanity than those in houses based on the older foundations. Also, the foundress categorically refused to put herself in a position in which she might be obliged to accept girls put into her house as into a prison, by the state. Yet despite this the population was subjected to a severe, unrelenting regime of

¹¹ Verrier, *Positio*, p.144.

restraint, dull work and intellectual deprivation within very narrow physical bounds.¹² If it was not actually a prison, the discipline inside it had a penal character. The status of the penitents in some respects was treated as worthless, for nothing was recorded of the girls' experiences before they entered the house; nothing from their lives outside could be mentioned freely; nothing was consciously learned from them. And in conformity with the tendency established by the seventeenth-century refuges, nothing in the texts suggests that Lamourous' penitents were being realistically prepared for re-entry into the world outside. Their principal occupation was sewing, the means by which most poor women earned income at home, and very poorly paid. The very quietness and regularity of their employment was likely to render them unable to tolerate employment in noisy surroundings, say, in a factory. Lamourous and her sisters had been taught that successful-re-education of a penitent was to bring her humbly before the feet of God, and, if possible, to leave her there.



The Miséricorde de Bordeaux continued to work with delinquent, "difficult" or morally endangered girls well into the twentieth century, but the intellectual climate of 1968 affected the former religious orthodoxy of its novices to such an extent that they withdrew from their commitment to the sisterhood.¹³ The Police Department of Bordeaux has bought the original mother house, whose chapel has been reserved as part of the artistic heritage of the nation. The congregation itself has withdrawn to Pian, where a large chapel and refuge had been built late in the nineteenth century on property formerly belonging to the foundress. The buildings, and the work for disadvantaged girls still continued within them, are now the responsibility of the state, while the Sisters of the Miséricorde have amalgamated with the Congregation of Marie-Joseph,

¹² The actual building in the Place Ste Eulalie, with its high old walls and barred windows, forms a self-contained island at the side of the square. It still retains the form, even the air, of its original function; it was a building designed to preserve the absolute seclusion of a congregation of strictly cloistered nuns. The central open area is small; about the size of a couple of tennis courts.

¹³ Evidence of Sister Marie du Sacré-Cœur, one of the four surviving sisters at Pian.

the "prison sisters", who, like them, originated in Bordeaux during the nineteenth century to care for the victims of poverty and social disgrace.

The Miséricorde de Laval - founded November 1818.

On 1 November, 1818, Thérèse Rondeau opened a register for her newly founded *miséricorde* in the rue du Hameau with five names. By 20 August 1820 there were 28 penitents and three resident directresses, friends of the young Bonne Mère who worked for nothing, as well as herself, her mother and her little brother. Two other young women came in daily to share in the work. All these bodies were in a small two-storey house meant for one family.¹⁴ From a manuscript account that has survived, it appears that beds were placed even in the passages, but that even so "the Mother Superior had the pain of continually having to ask those souls who applied for admission, to wait..."¹⁵ All worked to earn bread for the house, doing embroidery, spinning, weaving or sewing, if they knew how. As Lamourous had discovered, many of the girls who asked for refuge had not even the simplest skills, which suggests that they had begun earning their keep from prostitution very young. The necessity of living in close proximity with one another reinforced the spirituality taught by Lamourous, that sisters and penitents should form one body, in simplicity, sharing everything.¹⁶ Their daily rule of life was that followed at Bordeaux.

However worthwhile the experience of those early months may have been, Rondeau's spiritual director, Fr Chanon, did not wish her work to be limited to so few. In May 1819 he began to push her into the mould of a middle class mother superior. A large private house with ample grounds was put up for auction in the rue de Paradis, almost opposite St Vénérand, her parish church. Although Rondeau could barely feed her penitents and had no capital, she made a successful bid for the property. The Jesuit fathers had encouraged her to do this and doubtless the gifts of money which tided the

¹⁴ The house is still standing. All the buildings connected with this enterprise, except the church and seminary of St Michel, are still in existence and appear to be in very good repair. St Michel's supermarket has replaced the old Jesuit base.

¹⁵ Bru, *Thérèse Rondeau*, p.69. Unfortunately I did not gain permission to examine this document personally.

¹⁶ Although Rondeau had had only three months' training at the Miséricorde de Bordeaux, its foundress wrote to her faithfully several times a year until her death in 1836, answering her queries and giving advice.

foundress over her first few years were made mostly at their suggestion. A letter from the Prefect of the Mayenne to the Minister of the Interior suggests that they had succeeded in "procuring substantial alms" for the Laval refuge.¹⁷ Both he and the bishop of Le Mans demanded that she explain on what regulations or statutes her house was based.¹⁸ At the period of transition from the rue du Hameau to the larger building in the rue de Paradis, Rondeau had been given the help of two of Lamourous' best assistants, Laure de Labordère and her chief surveillante, Marinette. Faced with the demands of authority, Rondeau and Labordère hastily put together a set of regulations containing 14 articles, which they sent to the mayor without waiting for advice from Bordeaux. With the bishop's approval these were forwarded to the Minister of the Interior by the prefect, only to be returned with the request that the municipal council of Laval deliberate on them and send in its report as well. In 1822 the prefect was still complaining that the Miséricorde had still not obtained legal recognition, which was "more and more necessary" in order that the state might have some control over the *filles corrompues* whom it took in.

Apart from the mayor, de Hercé¹⁹, and two others, the members of the council were hostile to Rondeau's work, in fact they had already spoken of closing the Miséricorde because it was suggested that criminals would take refuge there and that in any case the house accepted too many women.²⁰ In a session of the municipal council note was taken of the aims of the Miséricorde, "that the object of this house is to serve as an asylum to evil-living girls and widows who, repenting of their faults come freely to ask to be admitted..."²¹ While the council accepted that the Miséricorde was of great advantage to public morals, it demanded that only girls and widows originating from the Mayenne should be admitted and that neither the city nor its inhabitants should ever be

¹⁷ Arch.Mayenne, 75bis, Dossier on Miséricorde, letter dated 1 Jan.1821.

¹⁸ Mgr Claude-Madeleine de La Myre-Mory; he had jurisdiction over Laval.

¹⁹ Before she became a foundress Rondeau had spent many evenings nursing de Hercé's wife and continued to do so until the woman's death after she returned from Bordeaux. The mayor subsequently entered the Church and became Bishop of Nantes.

²⁰ From a letter from Labordère (Sr St Jean de Dieu) to her aunt, M.T.C. de Lamourous, 21.4.1821, quoted by Verrier, *Positio*, Pt I, p.487 .

²¹ *Registre des délibérations du Conseil Municipal*, 1 mai 1818 à 6 mai 1822, Vol.no.4, Session 50, 16 avril 1821, Arch. de la Mayenne.

obliged to pay "so much as a centime" for their support. The council already gave a substantial part of the city's income to poor relief at that time, for the Mayenne was a depressed area in the early years of the Restoration.

Owing to various ministerial delays, official recognition was not granted by Charles X until 29 January, 1826. The acceptance of the state's right to investigate the house, so greatly feared by Lamourous with regard to her establishment, does not appear to have obliged Rondeau to take in girls at the demand of the local authorities.²² Despite the requirement of article 13 of the Imperial Decree that prefects or their substitutes inspect all officially recognised houses of refuge once every three months, there is no evidence that this ever caused Rondeau any trouble. By the end of the century the Miséricorde de Laval was described by the prefect as "as a private establishment...it does not belong to the prefectural administration to deal with that house in order to place a girl in it."²³

Rondeau's religious status continued to be that of a lay sister, as she had never submitted any religious constitutions for episcopal approval. At the time of her "novitiate" at Bordeaux, that house was not religiously constituted either, officially speaking, for at the time of its foundation the state had not favoured the creation of female religious congregations. The government of the Restoration was more favourable to the female orders than that of the First Consul had been. Both the Bishop of Le Mans and the Jesuit fathers of Laval added to the pressure under which Rondeau lived by attempting to persuade her to put her congregation under a rule similar to that of the Visitandines, whereby the terms of virtual equality on which her lay sisters shared the house with the penitents would have been lost, and with it the studied resemblance of her community to that founded by Lamourous. From 1822 to 1828, out of loyalty to the latter, she resolutely refused the attempts of her clerical superiors to normalise her

²² Antoine Bru's examination of the registers between 1818 and 1841 shows only three girls accepted from the police during that time.

²³ Arch.Dept. de Mayenne. XI792. Dossier no.3. Reply to a letter from the mayor of Ombrières, 4 October, 1898. This is the only application of its kind to be found in the dossier.

congregation. Her subsequent grave illness made them suspend their efforts and after her recovery it does not appear that the question was ever raised again.

With regard to the penitents' freedom to come or go, it is certain, according to Antoine Bru, that some of the girls were put inside "a little inspite of themselves." This must have happened with regard to minors placed in care by parents or family, and who would have been allowed to leave on their majority, if they asked hard enough. Another of Rondeau's biographers, Marc Nurit, S.J., wrote that the sisters did not let a girl leave until they had tried all possible means to convert her. In the event of failure "one opens the door to her and cuts off this gangrened limb from the other members of the community."²⁴ The greatest concern of "Thérèse Rondeau, "worthy pupil of Mlle de Lamourous", to quote Father Verrier, was the salvation of souls. "The Miséricorde has no other goal", the elder woman wrote, "but to open the path home to the prodigal child...to search for the lost sheep."²⁵ In this it followed the direct line set by the pastoral teaching of the period, especially that of Jean-Baptiste Rauzon's Pretres de la Mission who traversed France from the North to the Midi with their terrifying sermons on hell.²⁶



With regard to the numbers of girls and women in Rondeau's care, there seems to be a certain disagreement. Antoine Bru, chaplain of the house in 1985, wrote that for the first two years fewer than ten penitents were taken in per annum because of the limited space available. In April 1820, when Rondeau bought the large property in the

²⁴ M. Nurit, *Vie de la Mere Thérèse*, Paris, 1869, p.82.

²⁵ Letter from Lamourous to Rondeau in Verrier's *Positio*, p.400

²⁶ This congregation was begun in 1808 by Rauzon, then under the patronage of Mgr Forbin-Janson it was confirmed by an ordonnance of Louis XVIII as the Missionaires de France in 1818. Larousse' *Dictionnaire du XVIIIe siecle* claims that the missionaries made themselves famous by the intemperance of their language and the "burlesque ceremonies" by which they sought to strike the popular imagination and by their fiery denunciations of liberty and progress. During the July Revolution their magnificent convent outside Paris was destroyed. In 1834 they reappeared under the name of Fathers of Mercy.

rue de Paradis, she had 30 penitents.²⁷ Bru's figures for the next 21 years, taken from the registers, show that a total of 627 females were received up to 1841.²⁸ This means that between May 1820 and the end of 1841 an average of 28 female subjects a year entered, or roughly two a month. Bru found that approximately one third of these were brought to the house by members of their own families, usually father, mother, uncle or aunt. Two were brought in by their husbands. The remainder were presented by sponsors: middle class ladies, priests, monks and nuns.

The number of girls leaving the refuge of their own free will was 297 for the whole 23-year period. Bru does not specify the reasons which caused the girls to leave; one supposes therefore that only a small number went out to take up respectable work, despite the fact that by 1836 Parent-Duchâtelet had been informed that "several" had found employment or contracted marriage.²⁹ The figures assembled by Bru show that there could have been between 12 and 13 exits a year, or one a month. The death rate of 324 over the period may be roughly calculated at fourteen a year. Very few of those who entered below the age of 20 survived into longevity if they stayed in the house. If they did not leave in the first five years, Bru found that they usually died young. Up to the end of 1841 only ten per cent of the entrants were put in the "Preservation Class" for orphans or children in moral danger. Neither Rondeau or Lamourous saw their mission as including the care of innocent children, from whatever background.

Bru's figures give a very general picture, but they can be summarized by saying that in the years 1818 to 1841, 627 females entered the house, of whom the average age was 26.5 years. Of these, 297 left voluntarily, mostly within the first five years, and probably many after only a few months, if the registers of the house at Bordeaux are anything to go by. The 330 girls and women remaining died while still in residence, most of them during the first five years, and some of them later than 1841. By this showing the number of subjects entering the Miséricorde each year during the first

²⁷ Letter from Rondeau to Lamourous, *Positio*, Pt 2, p.403.

²⁸ See Appendix II at the end of the chapter. Bru did not collect figures for the subsequent years. He said that he found the calculations extremely difficult to make. I was not allowed to study the registers, but he kindly gave me several sheets of rough notes that he had made.

²⁹ Parent, *De la Prostitution*, Vol II, pp 387/389.

twenty years of the establishment's existence, was almost cancelled out by the number who left voluntarily or who died, leaving a small annual surplus which would increase the nucleus of long-term residents very gradually. This appears to indicate that despite the familial atmosphere in the house, and the comparatively gentle discipline, most girls still did not stay, destitute as they may have been.

The testimony given so much credence by Parent Duchâtelet, notably that the penitents hated to leave and if they did so it was only to take up employment or return to their families, is shown to be notably inaccurate in the light of the above. In addition the doctor's informant knew nothing of Lamourous' work at Bordeaux, for he or she ascribed to Rondeau the sole credit for having drawn up the regulations of the Miséricorde. This person also informed the doctor that, in late 1836 or early 1837, the Laval refuge contained 260 women, of whom *more than sixty* had been there between 12 and 15 years.³⁰ If this had been correct, then over two-thirds of the 324 deaths recorded in the registers for the period 1820 to 1841 must have occurred after 1837. Such a disaster would not have gone unremarked. It is obvious that Parent was given inaccurate figures, probably based on hearsay, yet from a source which he thought reliable.

Rondeau's work was also publicly mentioned by at least one other medical man in the nineteenth century. Dr. H. Homo, who was in charge of the Prostitutes' Dispensary of Château-Gontier, a town not far from Laval, wrote in 1872 that the praise given by Parent-Duchâtelet to the late Bonne Mère of Laval was, however high, still below her deserts. Although admitting himself not able to give an idea of the number of entries and exits, he wrote that between 350 and 400 girls and women were lodged there at the time of writing. He put the annual mortality rate at between ten and twenty a year. In particular he remarked that he knew that very few prostitutes from local brothels ever asked for shelter at the Miséricorde, and this was because it was a

³⁰ Parent, Vol.II, p.388.

convent, which was associated in their eyes with prison.³¹ A few pages further on, unconsciously contradicting Parent-Duchâtelet's statement that virtually all Rondeau's penitents left to enter respectable work, or returned home to be the support of their families, Homo remarked on the disappointments attached to the work of rehabilitation:

...the most painful of these is caused by the relapse of a penitent, particularly when, believing in her firm resolution, one had thought it possible to find work for her out in the world. It is the fear of this misfortune which obliges the ladies of the Miséricorde de Laval to refuse almost all demands that they receive for girls to become servants or workers.³²

It was this fear, mentioned by writers on all the refuges in this study, which led those in charge of them to keep the women as long as they could, and which must have destroyed in the eyes of the penitents, particularly those under age, the pretension of the foundresses that everyone was free to go if she pleased. Eventually the community would have been largely composed of "old girls", with a flow in of newcomers and outwards of unhappy older girls and minors reaching their majority, leaving behind a small new deposit of stable subjects every year. The refuge also retained any newcomers who were sick on arrival, unless the disease was syphilis or mental illness. Its willingness to do this would increase the death rate of the house, but not damage the stability of the penitent population. The contemporary writers on all the refuges in this study never fail to describe the attention and emotion centering on the last hours of the dying; to witness their holy deaths gave meaning to the life of the cloistered women. The disposition of the soul in its last hours is the most important circumstance of a Christian's life in Roman Catholic theology, and it appears to have been treated as such in the enclosed world of the refuge. Nearly every piece of information given with regard to the penitents by the biographers of all the foundresses mentioned in this study are to do with the girls' deaths, and that is true even for the publication by Antoine Bru in 1981 and the re-issue of *Redemption* by the Bon Pasteur d'Angers in 1985. Very,

³¹ Dr. H. Homo, *Etude sur la Prostitution dans la Ville de Château-Gontier*, J.B. Baillièrre et Fils, Paris, 1872, p.388.

³² *Ibid.*p.159.

very few penitents refused the sacraments of the Church at the final moment, in fact those who had left the refuges and returned to the world, finding themselves *in extremis*, often asked to be taken back to the refuge to die. This phenomenon was observed by Dr. Homo, an independent witness, as well as the hagiographers of Pelletier, Chupin, Lamourous and Rondeau. these writers make it clear that the prime motive of the institutes they describe was redemptive; the girls' salvation was the heart of the matter. Despite all that may have been claimed by their admirers, returning the lost sheep to an outside world of wolves was not the aim to which Rondeau and others like had devoted their lives.



Before her death in 1866 Rondeau had made a small foundation outside Laval, St Joseph des Champs, a holiday home for her girls on the farm which she had bought years earlier. As well as the house founded at Quimper, there were also two independent Polish foundations, at Warsaw and Cracow, made by women who had visited the Bonne Mère at Laval to learn her methods. Another house was opened at Lisieux, some time in the twentieth century. All the French foundations still exist, but not as refuges for the fallen. The little Preservation class, which was begun as a mere annexe to the major work late in the nineteenth century, grew in importance until, some time after the First World War, its function as a "special school" for disadvantaged girls became the main work done. The mother house itself now boards such children, although their teachers are paid by the state, which has complete authority over their treatment. The religious congregation still occupies the main buildings, together with a number of elderly women, former old girls, some of whom entered the house as children in their teens. Although several of the sisters of the Miséricorde are still in early middle age, the congregation is suffering from that absence of vocations among young women which has decimated the staff of religious houses in France, particularly during the last twenty years.

go to p. 200

The Refuge Sainte Anne, Paris - founded 25 January, 1854.

This refuge, the most recently established of the three, was in essence like the others in that it existed to encourage some of society's outcasts to give up the normal freedoms of life in order to avoid spiritual rather than physical harm. The originality of Mlle Chupin's house lay rather in herself than in any system she initiated. She was the only foundress in this study to have had any experience of criminal or prostitute women before making her foundation. Negative evidence suggests that she did not follow the conventual model when setting up her refuge. Her biographer, the Dominican Fr Mortier, does not mention that she drew up formal regulations for the control of the girls' time. Either this means that there were none, which is unlikely, or that they were not proper in his eyes.

Her years as a wardress at Saint Lazare had not left her with a jailor's mentality, for her conduct towards her penitents - or her children, as she inevitably called them - showed a relaxed attitude towards security measures and a positive rejection of the rigid "silent system" employed in other houses. She believed that her girls were too wild to accept harsh rules, and that unremitting kindness was the only way to reach them. Her door was always open both ways; she liked to say that her girls were free to come, free to go and free to come back.³³ Mortier admits that she had methods "peculiar to herself" which distinguished her house from all other similar establishments. The penitents of the Refuge Ste Anne were not rigidly secluded from the outside world. They were allowed out into the street; they might receive visitors and speak to them without the intervention of the convent grille. They wore normal dress, for a uniform "reminds them that they have sinned".³⁴

Just as the origins of the Miséricordes of Bordeaux and Laval were very modest, consisting in a rented house and a few girls from the streets, so Chupin's first establishment was even more restricted. A small apartment of four rooms in the rue de

³³ Mortier, *Bonne Mère*, p.177.

³⁴ Mortier, p.23.

Vaugirard was opened as a refuge by her on 25 January 1854. Despite her poverty she had appointed her board of directors: the Virgin, St Anne and St Joseph. Some time earlier, kneeling before Mary's image in Notre Dame, obsessed with her projected new responsibilities, Chupin had heard an inner voice command: "Begin, I will help you." The locution was repeated several times. Her confessor, Fr Aussant, thereupon urged her to take penitents immediately, although she had no money for provisions. In six weeks she had accumulated seventeen girls - probably *clandestines* who had not submitted to registration. Mortier did not allow himself to do more than hint: "one girl - 19 years old - was completely lost; the youngest - 14 years - was preparing to follow her in order to live."³⁵ These two, worn out by fatigue and malnutrition, had been sent to Chupin by "a wretched child whom she had known at Saint Lazare." One assumes that this intermediary was a girl who did not wish to reform, who was making money in other words, but who, as Parent Duchâtelet had noticed, encouraged others of her trade who were too sick to work to get help from a refuge.³⁶

Chupin and her protégées had everything in common at the rue de Vaugirard; they ate, worked and prayed together. The sick were put into Chupin's own bed. During the day the mattresses on which the girls slept were rolled up and hidden behind the curtains. At night Chupin sent most of them off by themselves to church, while she pulled out the bedding and arranged it in rows. Then she cooked for the household, and the girls ate, sitting on their beds, as there was no room for a table. The atmosphere was informal and intimate. Chupin does not appear to have anticipated trouble from the dreaded "*tribadisme*" that Parent had considered one of the plagues of Saint Lazare. Perhaps she knew that those girls who had been in prostitution so long that they preferred to choose women as their *amants de coeur* were not likely to seek the help of a refuge. St John Eudes had ordered that the penitents' dormitory in houses of N.D. de Charité du Refuge should be illuminated by candlelight the whole night long, and that a grille should be set into its door, so that observations could be made by

³⁵ Mortier, p.82.

³⁶ Parent Duchâtelet, *Prost. dans la V. de Paris*, Vol. II, p.373.

the nun in charge of night duty. In other refuges, by the insistence that conversations in recreation time must never be tête-à-tête, the direction appears to have suspected all friendship between the girls as preparatory to lesbianism. Perhaps the experienced Chupin did not confound a need for affection with the expression of a deviant sexuality. That she actually allowed the girls to go off to benediction while she set out the bedding is wildly liberal compared with the attitude of Thérèse Rondeau, for instance, who never took her girls to a public church, even though the nearest was just across the road.

For some years she was able to get away with it. She took her girls to mass openly; she did not expect them to keep strictly cloistered nor did she restrict their visitors severely, or make them conduct conversation through the floor-to-ceiling bars of a convent grille. It appears that she tried to give her penitents a degree of the ordinary human freedoms. She abstained from imposing uniformity of dress, because she believed such a thing to be a stigma. Her "rough kindness", as Mortier describes it, was expressed physically, with a hug for the obedient, a push or a slap for the unruly. When comforting a girl, for instance, she would slip her a couple of centimes; if she did this, it seems evident that she allowed the girl to go out and spend them. According to an oral testimony from the surviving nuns of her congregation, she always addressed the girls with the familiar *tu*.³⁷ As later evidence shows that Chupin did not keep silence at table, even when she had become a full Dominican sister, it is also highly likely that she did not enforce the monastic rule of silence in her house during the early years.

The Dominican Brothers of Paris supported the Refuge Sainte Anne as much as they could and in return expected that the charity should eventually become what Mortier calls "fundamentally Dominican". Joining the congregation's female Third Order was as far as Chupin wished to go, yet the First Order (the males) would not accept anything less than her full submission. Mortier explained that a purely lay

³⁷ Told to the author during an interview in July 1985.

community of tertiaries cannot last for long," wrote Mortier. And why not? "Rules are necessary, and a hierarchy, which, by the force of circumstances, develops and transforms these rudimentary elements into a regular community." The rudimentary element that was Chupin may, he believed, have feared just that, but she gave way "for the good of the work".³⁸ In doing so she followed a pattern which repeated itself over the years. Her work of generosity meant for a few was not allowed to remain small, for the Brotherhood now sent her women and girls as prospective penitents. Feeding and lodging them became ever more difficult. In 1856 the Dominicans found her an old factory in large grounds on the Boulevard St Jacques, and one supposes that they found the deposit of 2500 frs needed for the lease. It was at this moment that she signed herself "Fondatrice de l'Œuvre Sainte-Anne". Her boarders soon numbered 150, earning their bread by contract sewing. Other money came from private charity and annual donations by various civic authorities, a proof that the Paris Prefecture recognised her work as beneficial.³⁹

It appeared now as later that those who helped the Bonne Mère, who had had the simplicity to ask St Joseph to take charge of her finances, were not themselves good judges of how money should be spent, although they were far better educated than she. The vast lodgings in the rue St Jacques were in a state of disrepair and situated in the worst possible neighbourhood. Troubles of maintenance within, fighting and disturbances in the streets without, made the new home uncomfortable. Whether the girls stayed, and how long they stayed, is not reported, nor whether Chupin had to tighten her interior discipline, nor what formal rules the girls had to live under.

The Dominicans visited and collected alms for the new refuge until the end of 1857. After that they withdrew their support for a time. Their order had split into two opposing factions, with Father Danzas controlling the Province of Lyons and Father Besson the Province of France, which contained Paris. All this was a great trial to

³⁸ Mortier, p.97.

³⁹ In 1855 the Ministry of the Interior gave 2000fr, the Department of the Seine 500 fr and the City of Paris 500 fr. Mortier, p.119.

Chupin, who had no fine sense of politics to help her thread her way through the affair. It seems evident that control of her refuge was in dispute within the Brotherhood, and that the Lyons branch wished to demote her in favour of another sister. She resisted the attempt with the help of the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr Morlot, a proceeding which antagonised both factions. Accordingly the Dominicans ordered their chaplain not to celebrate Mass in the house and allowed it to be known that they wished to remove the Sacrament from its oratory. Two years later, at the end of 1859, the Paris branch led by Father Chocarne made overtures of peace to Chupin.⁴⁰

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The Refuge Sainte Anne was, legally speaking, merely a private association until it obtained recognition as being *d'utilité publique* in 1861. This meant that the refuge had to conform to the regulations of the decree of 26 December 1810, which included the adoption of the constitutions laid down for John Eudes' original refuge at Caen.⁴¹ Chupin had to take this step in order to profit from a very large bequest made to her house in 1860.⁴² As a result, the financial conduct of the refuge became the responsibility of a voluntary Committee of Administration, on which Chupin had a place. The other members were the Duke de Bassano, the Prince de Beauveau, Brother Lion, the young chaplain of the house,⁴³ Baron de Zangiacomi, Vicomte Armand de Melun (one of the leading figures in nineteenth-century social catholicism), State Councillor Chassérian, Emile Keller, a parliamentarian, Guilleman, a lawyer, and Baron de Monestrol, the secretary. Despite the *éclat* given by the aristocratic

⁴⁰ Mortier, p.115.

⁴¹ See Appendix bbbbbbbbbbbbbbb

⁴² As the bequest was made to her house, and not to her personally, the foundress could not touch the money until the house had legal personality.

⁴³ The canonical superior was not necessarily the chaplain. Lion was "the children's chaplain" and was extremely good and paternal, according to Chupin. His devotion left him open to calumny, so he offered himself for work in the foreign missions and was sent to Mossul by his superiors. "Memoirs", typed résumé, p.31, Archives of R.Ste Anne, Chatillon I was assured by Mother Marie-Pierre, titular head of the remnant of the congregation at Chatillon, that this document is all that is left of the many notebooks filled by Chupin, which were in existence when Mortier was writing..

membership of the committee, showing that the foundress still had the patronage of the quartier Saint-Germain, it did not succeed in running the Refuge Ste Anne any more wisely than Chupin had done on her own. The gentlemen bought a small chateau on behalf of the community with the aid of the Bonne Mère's inheritance, a former hunting lodge once used by Louis XIV and Mlle de la Vallière, on the perimeter of the capital in the suburb of Clichy la Garenne. It had been offered at the "very advantageous price" of 120,000 frs, by the Duc de Morny, one of the most powerful men in France, an advisor of the Emperor, whose half brother men said he was, owing to a love affair between the former queen of Holland and the count de Flahaut. Perhaps because of the cloud over his own origins, Morny may have had some sympathy for the girls Chupin cared for. However, even though the property may have been a bargain, its purchase involved the committee in very great debt, both to finish paying for the buildings and to put them in a decent state of repair.

Chupin's administrative autonomy now having been lost, her community's unique degree of informality was also eventually removed. In his chapter *March religieuse de l'œuvre* (Religious development of the work) Mortier wrote that she naturally respected the authority of the Church, but did not wish it to come too close to her.

She wished to maintain her simple, humble way of doing things, which allowed her to; open her door wide to all the unhappy girls, without counting or choosing....As for the money, who cared! Let God provide.⁴⁴

It was hard to make her give way on these points, according to Mortier. He also lets it appear that Chupin's recruitment of postulants had been "far from perfect". Unfortunately it was not only *âmes d'élite* who presented themselves, but certain "vulgar spirits...mediocre natures who stayed subject to...human passions, to selfishness, to jealousy, to ambition."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mortier, p.148

⁴⁵ Mortier, p.136.

It was not only her choice of postulants which displeased the ecclesiastical authorities: she was too inclined to take common prostitutes into the refuge. Before the move to Clichy she had taken all who came to her, especially girls from Saint Lazare. Her penitents had been divided into two classes, the *Pérsévérance* for girls who wished to stay for life and the *Sacré Cœur* for girls of all ages and conditions "who had fallen more or less low". They had come from the fringe of the fringe - disgraced females who had been through prison and from there to the streets. Mortier deprecated the Bonne Mere's choice of subjects in the early years. They were of the lowest kind, he wrote, "girls just released from Saint Lazare, abandoned wretches from the gutter."⁴⁶ One might run risks from allowed freedom to such as they. To Chupin, such risks were worth taking. During her work as a prison officer she must have picked up a great deal of knowledge concerning the background from which the most wretched of "her children" came. Obviously she believed that they deserved a chance to prove that they had good qualities. No girls below the age of 143 had been admitted,⁴⁷ showing that the foundress had not yielded to the temptation to secure a force of child labourers whose youth constrained them to spend a much longer period inside the refuge than older girls, even when these too were minors.

The *compte moral* of 1862 showed that there had been an average of 65 girls and 15 sisters present each month of the year. The goals of the refuge mentioned in the same document were "to collect and withdraw from disorder those poor girls whom poverty or youthful passions have cause to fall, and who cannot return to the right path without the aid of religion and Christian charity," the usual vague description. It could mean that they were all clandestine prostitutes, or that none were. The poor street girls, whom Chupin had seen in Saint Lazare and for whom she had worked, may have been discouraged by the distance, or perhaps did not know the way to Clichy. The *compte moral* of 1867 contains a note of the Bonne Mère's concern that many girls could not

⁴⁶ Mortier p.126.

⁴⁷ From figures given to Alexandre Dumas, Fils, and quoted by Mortier on p.166 of his biography.

profit from the hour of grace in which they wished to change their lives for the better, because this hour was up when they were half-way to Clichy, and then the devil reclaimed his victim. The community was obviously not getting the kind of girls that it had been founded to help. A reason for this may well have been that the news had spread that Chupin's open house had now been turned into a strictly-run convent, no different from any other.

To make up for losing her situation in the heart of Paris, Chupin had the bold idea of asking Alexander Dumas the Younger, the celebrated author of *La Dame aux Camélias*, to act as a publicist for her work. Dumas described her and Lefort as "two pious sisters of the Dominican rule", and added, possibly encourage by Chupin, "by this definitive act of renunciation she has given God's official guarantee to the state and to timorous consciences".⁴⁸ It was to Dumas that Chupin gave a testimony of the results she had been able to obtain in the fourteen years since her house had been in existence. Out of 1,109 girls and women received:

- 6 had been baptised
- 41 admitted to First Communion
- 92 confirmed (this happens after First Communion)

This looks as if 139 separate girls were concerned, but the 92 confirmations might contain the girls who had been baptised and received First Communion in the house. Chupin's next figures were even more admirable:

- 230 reconciled with their families
- 66 placed in employment
- 75 married

making a sub-total of 471. These details suggest that overall 610 separate penitents had been helped and converted, but the figures cannot be taken at face value. The total of

⁴⁸ Alex. Dumas Fils, *Les Madeleines repenties*, Dentu, Paris, 1869, p.6. The articles from which this is compiled appeared in *Dartagnan* on 21, 28 and 30 May 1868.

the second list could include the 139 girls and women in the first; it would hardly exclude all of them. The number of women who left to get married is a higher figure than was claimed by the foundress of Laval, who merely mentioned "some have married".⁴⁹ The registers of Lamourous' foundation show only three women leaving in order to marry in a period of 41 years. As most marriages only take place after a period of courtship, and as not even Chupin would have allowed sweethearts to visit the girls while in residence, most of the weddings must have occurred after the girls had returned to their families or been placed in employment. The figure for weddings therefore should not be given as a separate total, or at least not as such a large one. It begins to be apparent why Chupin found it hard to keep books.

The most generous interpretation of the totals suggests that the Refuge Sainte Anne produced positive material benefits for almost 60% of all women and girls who entered it. A slightly more cautious estimate, supposing that the 139 making acts of religion formed part of those who subsequently left the house, credits Chupin with about 42% of successes. The unkindest view, which assumes that the figure for marriages ought not to be separated from the figure for those returned to family, still gives her a success rate (in the worldly sense) of 36%. If only data for the next 28 years had been available, it would have been possible to judge whether the "rough kindness" and informality of Chupin, who does not appear to have run her house strictly as a convent prior to the move to Clichy, had obtained more positive results in the years of her autonomy than she and her successors were able to do later, as regular nuns. One thing that the figure for marriages reveals is that the girls stayed in contact with the foundress after leaving the house.

As for the kind of women and girls received once Chupin's work had been bridled, as it were, by her Committee and her ecclesiastical superior, an undated leaflet distributed by the refuge, in which Chupin is mentioned as having directed it for almost 30 years, describes the penitents as "girls whom poverty, ignorance, bad counsel or the

⁴⁹ Rondeau in a *mémoire* to the Duchesse d'Angoulême, asking for alms, Sept. 1821, arch. Mis. Laval.

seductions of youth have involved in disorder." Such girls were received for nothing; no mention is made of the orphan boarders which by then formed a small Preservation Class. Chupin was reluctant to take them, wrote Mortier, so probably they were not present in any great number until after her replacement as Prioress in 1885.

The image the leaflet refers to is of youth led astray rather than known to be sexually disgraced. It is (admittedly slender) evidence of what, for the Bonne Mère, may have been another decision that she was led to make with reluctance. Although she had spent the best part of her life in contact with girls demoralised by an experience of either prison or prostitution, the Conseil d'Administration, which had expressed its regret, in 1867, that so few of the victims of vice were finding their way to Clichy, had ten years later set its face definitely against them. The war of 1870 had dispersed the patrons of former years; even the refuge had been left empty and subsequently pillaged. Nuns and penitents had found a temporary home at Boulogne, where Chupin eventually made a small daughter foundation. By 1872 she and the girls were back at Clichy, where a new Conseil d'Administration had been formed to guide their affairs. The Archbishop of Paris had appointed Mgr d'Hulst as canonical superior of the house.⁵⁰ In 1877, with what Mortier calls his "lofty consent", the Council decided to leave the ex-prisoners of Saint Lazare to the care of the Marie-Joseph Sisters and the ladies of the Bon Pasteur in the rue d'Enfer. In future the Refuge Sainte Anne would accept girls who had been deceived, hurt or abandoned, as long as they were not known to the police, meaning that registered prostitutes were debarred, however young. It was a rejection of the commission received by the Bonne Mère from the Virgin twenty-three years earlier. In 1879 Mgr d'Hulst was elected Honorary President of the Conseil d'Administration. Under his guidance the refuge made itself into a private company and borrowed 200,000 frs to buy a large property at Chatillon-sous-Bagneux, - characteristically, the former residence of a nobleman's mistress - in a secluded suburb outside Paris. This, with the addition of ugly bars on every window facing the street

⁵⁰ Maurice Le Sage d'Hauteroche d'Hulst, a *grand seigneur* by birth, 32 yrs old.

and entrance court, became the congregation's final home. Once installed, the community found room for over a hundred girls.

The year 1885 saw the third attempt to remove Chupin. Mgr d'Hulst successfully accomplished this in collaboration with Sister Thérèse de Jesus, a nun originally from another congregation, a stranger to the early group around the foundress. A committee was formed of d'Hulst, Thérèse de Jésus, and some of the Parisian Dominicans, whereby the constitutions were re-worded so as to "give a deeper and more serious meaning to the observation of the rules." Henceforth the *grand* and *petit silence* were enforced, together with the *coulpe*, the weekly session in which nuns are accused by one another of faults against the Rule and receive appropriate penances from their Mother. Its absence had strengthened the charge against the foundress, that she was incapable of giving her novices the exact principles of the regular life.

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It is obvious that within fifty years Chupin's friendly, informal group, so poor that it barely survived from week to week, "whose prayers brought daily miracles"⁵¹, was gradually fashioned by outside pressure, particularly clerical, into the standard home for bad girls: large, strictly enclosed, run like a convent, staffed by nuns. By insisting on the community's need for legal existence, the state had damaged the foundress' autonomy, a thing not bad in itself, but very burdensome to a woman whose form of communal service was eccentric. It is clear that this state of things had been prepared for, however, by the pressure put on Chupin to undertake the care of large numbers of girls. Once numbers grew the Dominicans were able to introduce members of their own lay tertiaries as staff. From that point Chupin's originality and independence were subject to a containing process which reached completion in 1885, when she was given the honorary title of Prioress General and forbidden all

⁵¹ Chupin, "*Mémoires*", p.21.

participation in the administration of her house and all private communication with the penitents. In 1892, as a result of a canonical visit by the R.P. Libercier, of the Dominican Third Teaching Order, the elderly foundress was even made to eat alone because she did not keep perfect silence at table.⁵²

The removal of the community to the property at Chatillon, a very long way from the heart of the city, represented a grave adulteration of the generosity of Chupin's ideas. It was then almost physically impossible for any of the city's prostitute girls and women to reach her on their own, particularly those who were sick or destitute. Even in 1869 Dumas had written that her work was very little known, and that this was so because the house at Clichy was on the periphery. Whereas an address in the Bld Saint Jacques might be passed on by word of mouth, and easily enquired for, Chatillon was at the end of the world. Its seclusion, appropriate for the lost weekends of wealthy lovers, was agreeable to the Conseil d'Administration, who did not wish the charity to be easily available to unsuitable subjects. There is also the possibility that the highly placed ladies who sometimes "adopted" a particular orphan from the Preservation Class did not care to be seen visiting a refuge⁵³.

This class had become, in 1926, the major concern of the house although it was still open to "fallen" women and girls and "difficult" daughters, put in by parents or step-parents. Perhaps by that time the refuge had reverted to something closer to its original character. It appears that it never achieved real success in attracting postulants from wealthy backgrounds. Mortier commented that it was one of the poorest charities he had ever seen⁵⁴. An undated document, *Notice sur l'œuvre*, published early this century shows that the sisters maintained great reverence for their foundress' methods, based on kindness and the slogan "Young souls ought to be governed by a sentiment of honour." They claimed that in Chupin's day the house had been for girls who came off

⁵²Mortier, p.21.

⁵³ The word "orphan" in this context meant a child of a legitimate marriage whose parents were not longer living, or had disappeared. A bastard without parents was known as a foundling, or *enfant trouvé*.

⁵⁴ In an interview with the author in 1985 Mother Marie-Pierre, then 80 years old, said that she had worked in the laundry with the girls for twelve years before being promoted to other duties, and that all the nuns worked.

the streets and had wished thereafter to live "that they might die well", but times had changed:

Today, there are no striking conversions. *Cette idée est une utopie.* In former times, after a dreadful fall, a memory of their faith gave the children of that time the desire, the need, of expiation, of pardon and of former happiness. Girls of today, having frequented state schools, know nothing of religion, nothing of God. For them the task is, at first, to render them happy by the force of kindness, patience and charity..An effect is produced, whether they stay or go. Those who go sometimes return to the old life, but often come back to Chatillon to die. So the Work is truly L'ŒUVRE DE LA PREPARATION INTIME ET ELOIGNEE D'UNE BONNE MORT.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Notice sur l'œuvre*, arch of N.D.de Grâce, Chatillon. Capitals are used for the final phrase in the original, which is a saying of the foundress. Translated, it means "the work of preparation, at close range and long range, for a good death."

PART THREE: PENITENCE AND LABOUR



Chapter VI - Spirituality

What comes out of the documents I have here is the following: the pupils of the religious orders are made to develop a sort of taste for suffering. I will say even more: they develop a taste for death.¹

When dealing with a phenomenon so alien to contemporary Western life as the nineteenth-century refuge, it is not enough to rely on narration, although the facts reveal more than just physical conditions. The question arises of how the inmates saw themselves. Did they perceive their life to be in physical terms as harsh and sterile as it appears to a modern reader? Certainly not, for conditions of life among the poor generally were hard already; there was never any question of lack of applications for places within the refuges.² Destitution and want were as much a presence in French cities of the period as they were in Dickensian London, at least until the middle of the century, and women were usually found more often in hardship than men. If many girls left the refuges after only a short stay, as facts suggest that they did, it probably was because the requirement to live very simply and to work hard was not the most demanding of those with which they were expected to comply. Their desire to lead a new life was tested to breaking point by the spiritual demands, the necessity of living mentally within a different world; a world deliberately, even self-righteously different from that outside the walls:

One enters or one leaves the enclosure...the door is a place of transition between the "cosmos", "our world", consecrated territory, and the "chaos", "a different kind of world", a foreign space, chaotic, peopled with strangers (assimilated...to demons and ghosts). For the catholic nun, chaos was, until recently, "the world", the place of "the prince of this world".³

¹ Extract from a debate in the Chamber of 30.II.1899. The speaker (Laferré) was referring to copies of the house journal "Bulletin de la Congrégation du Bon-Pasteur d'Angers. Cited on p.10 of Auguste Rivet's *La vérité sur le Bon-Pasteur*,

² Accounts of the Bon Pasteur refuges show that they sometimes lacked money but never subjects; the Miséricorde de Bordeaux' registers for 1800-1841 record an ever increasing intake of penitents; the similar establishment at Laval was asked to accept more girls than it could house (see under heading "Melanie Fleury" of following chapter.

³ Marie-Joséphine Aubert, *Les religieuses sont-elles des femmes?*; Centurion, Paris, 1976, p.61. The book is condensed from her doctoral thesis in religious science from the Université des sciences humaines, Strasbourg.

Although the Misericordes of Bordeaux and Laval, and the Refuge Sainte Anne were not convents in the full sense of the word until towards the end of the century, they were run on conventual lines. Only Thérèse Chupin's house showed a noticeable informality, and that was gradually corrected by outside pressures after 1862. It seems safe to say therefore that within all the refuges in this study a conventual spirituality was maintained, whether the staff were subjected to formally approved religious statutes or not. The houses appeared to those who were in charge of them not as grim institutions, but as havens offering shelter to girls who had been shipwrecked by a sea of troubles. The penitents who took advantage of what they offered might see them in exactly the same way, in time; indeed some of them chose to spend the rest of their lives within this practical embodiment of the ark of the Church. We must ask in their case what benefits they found there, apart from physical necessities, for the answer to this question is also the answer to how the permanent inmates of the refuge saw themselves. It lies in a consideration of the house as a miniature of the Church itself, in action with and for sinners, through the operation of the fundamental doctrine of penitence. To know the theology is to understand the practice: what seems harsh or repressive to twentieth-century minds was in fact the expression of serious compassion, based on a Platonic understanding of the body as essentially evil. It was the misfortune of the early Church to have accepted that view of reality literally, and to have applied it literally to the difficult writings of St Paul regarding the battle between the flesh and the spirit. The vindication of the flesh demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ has scarcely ever been a subject which the Church has been willing to pay great artists to portray. If that is too strong an expression, at least it is certain that scenes of the nativity (the flesh of an innocent child) and the crucifixion (tortured, punished flesh) far outnumber scenes of the resurrection as a subject fit for the walls of a sacred building. Portrayals of the risen Christ seated in judgment over the world, although these were very often commissioned, emphasise the power of the Son of God at the end of time, rather than

the physical simplicity of a man dressed rather like a gardener walking away from an empty grave on Easter morning.⁴

It is also possible to relate important factors in the treatment that the girls received to another Platonic doctrine, concerning the soul, which shows it as being basically unaffected by whatever the body experiences. Personality does not develop with and by means of physical life, but there is at conception "implanted in the body an immaterial, substantial self, which could well have existed long before and which certainly carried on for ever after the body had disappeared".⁵ A Church which accepts this can on the one hand, condemn the repentant prostitute if she returns to her trade, granting no weight to however much she been habituated over the years to an abnormal amount of sexual stimulation. Insofar as the inner (or separate) self is concerned, she has received the grace of God through absolution and communion and therefore has been strengthened sufficiently to have her own way over the body, as long as she *wills* to do so. On the other hand, if a penitent girl accepts the severe regime of the convent refuge, declares herself converted and then prays for death, this can be seen as the longing of the imprisoned self to unite with God, not a sign that the body is weary of a life of continual punishment. The old Jewish and early Christian belief in the unity of soul and body, which makes death total until the day of resurrection, destroys the whole idea of purgatory and therefore had been abandoned by the Church.

As this essay has already emphasized, the motivation behind the establishment of a refuge was evangelical in that the girls were there to be converted. When faith had been awakened they learned that works also were necessary; acts of penance were required of them, to make satisfaction in accordance with God's justice, although he had already accepted them into the Church for the sake of his son. This was so because, whereas the essential Christian doctrine is that Christ paid for all the sins of mankind by his own suffering and death, human nature requires that even after the backlog of a lifetime has been wiped out by baptism into the faith, provision shall be

⁴ John 20, v.15.

⁵ McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, p.148.

made to deal with further offences. Penance was the answer of the early Church to the problem of renewed sin among the faithful. Its essential component is absolution, which may be given to the dying even if they have not had time to confess and will certainly not have time to make satisfaction. According to the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (1912), the final absolution reconciles the soul to God but the lack of opportunity to make satisfaction will, according to Roman Catholic theology, necessitate a longer or more painful stay in purgatory, for one of the chief aims of penance is that by suffering it may purify the soul and contribute to its holiness. For this reason those who have lived in charity on earth, and who nevertheless have performed many acts of penance out of a generous desire to make amends, may hope to pass straight into heaven after death. Friends and lovers of the faithful dead may offer their own sufferings to God in satisfaction for the sins of the departed, or pay for masses to be said for their intention, or give alms to the poor and ask God to credit the virtue so gained to the account of those they have lost. Although this system may be understood only in a spiritual sense and operated with reverence, it is easy to see how it might lead, and indeed did lead to abuses. In France Jansenism was the most historically recent of those theologies, defined as erroneous by the Catholic Church, which opposed the accepted practice, declaring that absolution could not be obtained by proxy and should be sparingly given, even to those in agony, if a full confession and satisfaction for sin had not been made by the sinner prior to his last hour. In the past this question has had the deepest historical repercussions, for when Luther split the Church in the sixteenth century, it was initially over the subject of its power to give absolution.

In the seventeenth century the *Instructions to Confessors* of Bishop (later St) Charles Borromeo corrected the Church's pre-Reformation laxity. The writer held a severe view of the Christian's obligations to God. Although he believed in indulgences, he directed that a priest should not give absolution unless the penitent expressed *contrition*, that is to say a heartfelt sorrow for sin and at least a commencing love of God. To repent through fear of hell alone was not enough.

What! If you could die, my God, I would have caused your death a thousand times, by the horror which you have of sin, and yet you have not crushed and ruined this fool, this ingrate, this traitor, this perjurer and this Deicide. What do I say! You seek him still, you hold out a saving hand, you ask again for this abominable heart, the leavings of devils. *O God my mercy!* let the manner in which you treat me...vividly touch my heart, and strongly press it to consecrate itself entirely to your love.⁶

The above is taken from a book owned and read by Thérèse Rondeau, a work of devotion made from records of a notable preacher during the religious revival of the seventeenth century, when the Jesuits first began preaching the retreats for which they became famous. It is a fervent expression of the spirituality which arises from the teaching of St Charles Borromeo, whose views made a lasting impression on the French Church.⁷ He had been one of those who, at a time of increased interest in the foundation of refuges for women who had been marginalised by society, had pressed them to enter convents and submit to poverty, chastity and the cloister for life, rather than planning to re-enter the world some day.⁸

The rigorism that flows naturally from the ideas of God and man expressed so fervently by Huby makes it hard for a Christian to receive the sacrament of communion, for if absolution is administered with caution and severity, how much more must the living body of Christ be judged too sacred to be received without long preparation? Father Chaminade, the director of Mlle de Lamourous and the ecclesiastical superior of her house, advised Thérèse Rondeau that it was not good to allow the penitents to receive the eucharist until their piety had been proved by a residence of two years. His caution was based on the dread of allowing girls to "eat to their own damnation", to use an expression of St Paul, by making an unworthy communion.⁹ He warned the reverend mother that despite outward appearances, for a long time after their entry most of the girls were "all flesh". The piety which was so acutely conscious of the majesty

⁶ *Œuvres spirituelles et la vie du Père Huby, S.J.*, p.39, part of the Third Day of a Spiritual Retreat preached by the Father in 1690.

⁷ They were endorsed by the Assemblée générale du clergé de France, 1700.

⁸ S. Cohen, "Asylums for Women, etc." p.173.

⁹ Letter from Chaminade to Rondeau, 17 March, 1841; typed copy in the archives of the Miséricorde de Laval.

of God and the abject status of fallen man, however sincere and admirable, could not be of use to more than a spiritual élite, and yet "Although it is forgotten today," says the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, "this demanding attitude was one of the dominant notes in the mentality of the gallican church from the middle of the seventeenth century for almost two hundred years."¹⁰ Chaminade was obviously a rigorist, however devoted to Rome he might have been in other respects, and under his direction one may assume that the inmates of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux were often given severe penances to perform.

In the eighteenth century the moral theology of St Alphonso di Liguori set itself against those pastoral practises which made it hard for the common man to find peace with God. Doctrinally he attacked the Jansenist heresy, but essentially he wished to see the poor turn to the Church with confidence rather than dismay. As mentioned earlier, his writings were extremely popular in France, where they were promoted by the Society of Jesus and in particular by the abbé Gousset, later Cardinal Archbishop of Rheims¹¹. Liguori allowed the confessor to give absolution if the penitent merely expressed *attrition*, that is to say, fear of God's punishment and hope of his pardon. During the nineteenth century the abbé Gaume published a *Manuel des Confesseurs* in which Liguori's teachings were explained and justified by references to the writings of many revered confessors of the past. Extracts from Liguori's Moral Theology are given the most space in the book, together with the teachings of an anonymous writer called "*le pretre sanctifié*", which could be a nom de plume of Gaume himself. As an example of the kind of help a repentant prostitute might receive in the confessional, and as a demonstration of how the Church still saw the soul and body as being essential separate, a section of Gaume's *Manuel* is given below, in which Liguori is quoted on how to deal with the temptations of a "spirit of fornication":

...the powerful grace of God is needed, and great violence on the part of the

¹⁰ *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

¹¹ His book, *La Justification de la Théologie Morale du B. Alphonse-Marie de Liguori*, Besançon, 1832, introduced Liguori's theological position to the French Church.

patient [The one who is confessing.]. It will be very difficult for him to come out the victor from such a battle, unless he perseveres in the use of great mortifications and above all many prayers, petitioning thousands and thousands of times Our Lord and the holy Virgin, begging them with tears and groans to have pity on him. If he relaxes in prayer and mortification...he runs the greatest danger of falling, at least indirectly, into some secret acceptance of his pleasurable thoughts and desires which are contrary to purity.¹²

If this does not work, the text continues, exorcism should be considered as a remedy. Medieval as this sounds, it must be remembered that Gaume's *Manuel* was widely accepted during the whole nineteenth century in France and went into many editions. However gently the confessor treated his "patients" he was not allowed to suggest that they give themselves some consolation for being deprived of sexual love by the use of mental fantasy or masturbation. No indeed! Such things willingly indulged in were as bad as the fornication itself, for did not Christ say that he who looks on a woman with lust in his heart *has committed* adultery? The confessor had always to remember, when tempted to be lenient in this regard, that if he failed in his duty, he would be judged by Christ most severely.¹³ Gaume quotes the authority of Blessed Leonard du Port St Maurice regarding advice to any penitent "who has squatted in filth for years", that he or she should think every day for a few minutes of death, of hell and eternity.

Speak to his imagination; show him God, holding him suspended over hell, point out the crowds of the condemned in the depths of the abyss, and who did only what he has done, or even less.¹⁴

Yet Gaume is insistent that the confessor should be the kinder to his penitents "the more sunk in filth and mire that they are."¹⁵

The above extracts show that despite the more merciful tone the question of satisfaction was not dismissed, for the Church as a whole still agreed that the seriousness of sin cannot be understood by men if absolution is given for nothing, and Liguori himself wrote of the absolute necessity of a well-prepared death. Indeed the state of the soul in the final moments was considered crucial, for "One single mortal sin

¹²Gaume, *Manuel des Confesseurs*, Paris, 1872, 10th edition, p. 276.

¹³ Gaume, p.19.

¹⁴ Gaume, p.36.

¹⁵ Gaume, p.13.

is enough to throw into hell he who has committed it, if he dies before receiving God's pardon."¹⁶ It was accepted that penance is most important at the end of life, for then the soul undergoes its last struggle with evil, and then the devil is most strong. Although it is necessary to meet this crisis with faith, the believer is not expected to face it alone. The Church comes to his aid powerfully, for the sacrament of communion followed by the final absolution, if taken reverently, restore the parting soul to a state of grace which will be undisturbed for eternity. Although the last sacraments are not essential to salvation in the case of one whose life is already sanctified by faith and works, such a person is doubly blessed by receiving the *viaticum*, for then his or her soul will pass from this world to the upper reaches of purgatory, if not to heaven itself. For the truly faithful, according to the Church, death works in a special way as the final satisfaction for past sins. Perfectly accepted in union with Christ, and suffered humbly as part of the just reward for the sins of humanity, it places the soul in a state of complete purity. All self love and disordered attachments to the world having disappeared, the redemptive love of God is at last free to produce its full effect in the immediate gift of the splendour of the beatific vision. To die in such a state is to pass directly into heaven. Between the changeableness of life here in the body and the immutability of life in the future state, death appears as a moment of transition in which the individual takes its unalterable direction either towards light or darkness.

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According to the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* the dogma of eternal punishment was completely accepted in the West by the middle of the fifth century and was confirmed by the writings of theologians such as Aquinas, Gregory the Great, Anselm and Bernard, and by the visions of St Theresa of Avila, its only female doctor. Throughout the nineteenth century the French Church was in no doubt about its reality

¹⁶ Opening line of a diocesan publication, "Dispositions nécessaires pour le sacrement de pénitence" in *Opuscules Ascétiques*, Volume 4, Paris, after 1837.

and relevance.

In nineteenth-century France mission preachers let themselves go in evening sessions by candlelight in country areas, describing the medieval tortures laid up for the damned.¹⁷ Hell is not only eternal, they claimed, but commences immediately after death. It is a large abyss of fire, shared by both demons and the damned, who are tortured by this community of existence. It is a place of horror, made more so by the terrible disorder and hateful tyranny by which its society is dominated; a city of universal hate where the lost for ever exist, each subject not only to the general misery but also to particular tortures according to the particular sins of each. After the resurrection, at the final judgement, they will appear in the flesh before God, stinking and hideous, only to receive confirmation of the eternity of their suffering. One must not pity them for God no longer does. The doctrine also expressed clearly that even ignorance of the truth could be fatal, since to benefit from the redemption is not a right, but a privilege. Even babies dying without baptism were punished by an endless life in the pale shades of Limbo, although guiltless. The Church taught that these things were not to be understood during one's life on earth, but would become clear in the light of eternity. Ralph Gibson is convinced that, despite the assertions of Philippe Aries to the contrary and the findings of McManners regarding the liberal attitude of one or two highly placed churchmen, "the whole gigantic edifice of hell and damnation" which the French Church had erected over the centuries was believed in both by Catholic writers and preachers, and the convinced Christians in their audience.¹⁸ Within the nineteenth-century refuge, the closed world so similar to the cloister, guarded by thick walls and barred windows on the street side, all contemporary value systems were rejected in favour of the view of reality possessed by those who had lived in an earlier period of religious faith, and this includes the Liguorian teaching, for however "new" this seemed compared with the old rigorist position, it was still the production of a man

¹⁷ Larousse, *Grande Dictionnaire du XIXe siècle*, Vol. VII, 1870. The text continues: "This antiquated but powerful interpretation is not, of course, given to the better educated who come to the Lenten sermons at Notre-Dame."

¹⁸ R. Gibson, "Hellfire and Damnation in Nineteenth-Century France", *Catholic Historical Review*, July 1988, No. 3, p.386.

who had lived before the great Revolution. Father Combalot, a French priest devoted to Rome, a popular preacher of the nineteenth century, told his hearers quite unequivocally that:

The Church teaches us that eternal tortures exist for those crimes for which we did not obtain pardon at the hour of death. Therefore, whoever dies without having made penance for all his faults will be thrown into the abyss of divine vengeance...and after a thousand million years the reprobate will not have made a single step towards the end of it.¹⁹

Combalot was not invited to preach at Notre Dame, but he did preach missions and the type of audience he would address would be mostly from the lower classes, as were most penitents in convent refuges. One may assume that the doctrines they were taught were fundamental. Apart from regular religious instruction the penitents heard at least one retreat a year preached before Easter. The wider signification of being and action was explained theologically, in accordance with the teaching of Rome and those saints whose works had received its approval, while the daily life of the community was modelled on the ancient traditions of conventual practice. The responsibility of embodying the presence of a loving God within the refuge was a heavy one for the mother superior; she had to counteract by her day-to-day conduct the strong suggestion given by the religious teaching that the almighty Father was a demanding tyrant who had to be appeased by wounds, malnutrition and tears.

What were the most striking features of the life inside from the point of view of a new penitent? If she had come from a class which could afford to educate its daughters, she might have found very little that was really new to her, apart from the manual work expected. The Catholic boarding school resembled the convent in that the girls were expected to lead a quiet, supervised and disciplined life, with religious instruction, prayers and mass accepted as part of the system. On the whole, as far as the evidence permits us to judge, the typical nineteenth-century refuge took in only the daughters of the poor, so that for them it would have been the religious atmosphere, not

¹⁹ *Choix de la Prédication*, p.574.

the work, which expressed most powerfully the difference between the life outside and the new existence offered them. Its most striking feature was very probably the silence. Odile Arnold's examination of the last century's female religious orders in France discloses that despite their proliferation it was mostly in superficial details of dress that they were distinguishable from one another, therefore to know how they operated in general is to have a very good idea of the conditions of life in any particular one. With regard to the keeping of silence, the rules were standard:

The *grand silence* commenced in the evening...from 6.30 p.m. to 6.30 a.m. During this time it was absolutely forbidden to speak, even in a low voice, except in a case of extreme need..The *petit silence* operated at all other times of the day, except at recreation and, very rarely, during a meal on an important feast day...during work it was only broken by the singing of a canticle or some pious recitation. All day long...every communication was to be made in a low voice "as if one were at confession."²⁰

It is no wonder that Pelletier considered the loss of the right to speak freely as a particularly hard trial for the girls under her control; it is a deprivation with which anyone can commiserate, particularly in the case of the young. When one considers that these penitents must also do without caresses, or even a friendly touch of the hand, it is surprising that any stayed inside for long, particularly as most of these girls had had experience of touching and embracing in excess of what the sisters could ever have known. Yet they must not ever talk of it, except to their celibate class mistress or confessor, neither of whom would listen simply as a friend.

The second great difference between refuge life and that followed in the world outside was the special use of time. Apart from work and sometimes during work, the inhabitants spent hours each day in a combination of religious exercises: prayer, hearing mass, receiving religious instruction or singing devotional texts. In the convents which formed the Bon Pasteur generalate, for instance; the book of *Practical Rules* sets out that the "children", as all the inmates were called, apart from the nuns

²⁰ Odile Arnold, *Le corps et l'âme: la vie des religieuses au XIXe siècle*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1984, p.40.

themselves, were to hear mass devoutly, saying the words in unison with the priest, if he allowed it; to tell the rosary beads devoutly and to enter into the spirit of the different epochs of the Christian year: Advent, the mysteries of the Holy Childhood, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, the months of the Rosary and of the Dead. They were also to pray for the dead, to pray for souls in purgatory, especially for former companions, and to say their beads or attend mass especially for them. Exercises of piety that were encouraged, of which some were to be performed in free time, were visits to pray in front of the sacrament, examination of conscience and the monthly retreat. Readings from works of piety were to be given to the children every evening. St Alphonso di Liguori's books, *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament* or *Visits to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, were to be placed on the benches in the chapel.²¹ These little documents are written in the form of simple prayers expressing a deep sense of sin coupled with heartfelt devotion and trust. The suppliant asks to obtain the grace of complete emotional dependence on God and Mary. The books reinforce the teaching that the will is an obstacle to salvation until completely submitted to divine direction (and by inference to that of those who speak in God's place on earth). In the book of *Practical Rules* are the foundress' instructions that "We must do all in our power to preserve the children from the habit of performing exterior acts of religion mechanically and without piety...they must not be pious...to gain our esteem."

Another hardship from the penitents' point of view must have been the narrow physical limits in which their life was led. For those who had rebelled against parental control, or who had roamed the streets freely, looking for clients, to live literally cloistered like a nun must have been a heavy burden, indeed all the girls must have frequently longed for a change of scene. Most of the women were young when they entered, and one does not need more than that fact to be sure of the hours of boredom to which the life inside must have subjected them.

²¹ *Practical Rules for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes*, prepared by authority of Sr. Mary of St Marine Verger, Sup. General, Angers, 1897, p.36. These rules were almost entirely those which had been given to the order by St Mary Euphrasia. All Good Shepherd nuns were supposed to read a chapter of this or preceding editions once a day.

The break from normal life signified by the atmosphere of hushed restraint and frequent religious exercises was also underlined by the dress of the sisters, which was always different from what the girls wore, even if only in colour. The penitents, and even the orphans and preservatives, were never permitted to wear bright clothes or anything white, except in special cases, such as that of the errand runners of the Misericordes of Bordeaux and Laval, who wore a white cap when outside the convent, and a black one within it. The *Consacrées* of the Bon Pasteur refuges also wore a white cap, which they covered with a black lace veil at church services. The lay sisters and nuns, by contrast, always wore something white, even if only their bonnet and neckerchief. In the Eudist and Bon Pasteur refuges they dressed completely in white, apart from the black veil worn by the professed. Even their rosaries were white, being made out of bone. The Dominican nuns of the Refuge Sainte Anne also wore white robes with a black veil. The sisters of St Thomas de Villeneuve wore a white guimpe, black robes and a black veil. Except for the early years in the Refuge Sainte Anne, the girls in every refuge in this study wore a uniform dress of a sombre colour, usually dark blue or black, and a matching headdress of some sort. The trusted *surveillantes* of Laval and Bordeaux wore a black lace mantilla in chapel, like their counterparts in the Bon Pasteur refuges. The significance of this use of colour hardly needs explaining. The penitent women and girls who were there to expiate some form of sexual disgrace - even were it merely that of having lived in moral danger before entering - were contaminated by the sin of "impurity", that *boue infecte* which sticks to us wherever we go."²² The nun typically represented the bride of Christ and her physical virginity was part of the dowry which she brought him, although the orders also accepted widows, whose chastity within Christian marriage was considered a sufficient guarantee of their purity. The religious sister was required not only to be chaste, but to belong to a higher order of life; her virtue was to be a living rebuke and spur to the penitents'

²² Expression used by Marie-Eustelle, a pious middle class girl, to describe her constant mental temptation to think about sex. From Arnold's *Le corps et l'ame*, p.159.

conscience.²³

St Mary Euphrasia made very severe demands on her novices, so that they might attain that higher state:

I desire that everyone here should be saints, because you are all on the mountain. Each of you should be a living rule, so that, if the House were destroyed...and the Directories and Constitutions burnt, you would be so many living examples from which others could learn...

For this reason she added:

I must tell you that I prefer to maintain and cultivate the vocation of but one amongst you, rather than undertake the conversion of fifty or even a hundred penitents...for...we must always aim at what is the most perfect.²⁴

Another great difference between life inside the convent and life in the world was the state of unquestioning obedience in which everyone lived. An attitude of continual submission was aimed at, which not only allowed a large group of people to interact smoothly, but was used to gain control over the emotions. The affectivity of a houseful of women, some of them very young, was denied expression except towards God or the reverend mother, who was the visible bearer of his presence in the community. This did not mean that the inmates were not expected to love one another "in Christ", that is to say impersonally. Exchanges of affection, endearments, private conversation, gestures, touching, time spent alone together were forbidden not only between penitents, between them and the religious sisters, but even between the religious themselves in order to concentrate the mind on the higher love, and to avoid occasions for stirring up the dangerous desires of the flesh. The vertical relationship from penitent to her class mother, and from the nun upwards to the Bonne Mère was meant

²³ In Australia the popular mind summed it up neatly:
 Herself as pure as crystal snow
 That falls from Heaven above,
 She looks upon the Magdalen
 Not with contempt, but love.

From *The Catholic Press*, 23 November, 1895. Part of a poem, "The Good Samaritan Nun", quoted by Judith Godden in "Sectarianism and Purity within the Woman's Sphere: Sydney Refuges during the Late Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Religious History*, Vol.14, no.3, June 1987, p.291.

²⁴ *Confereces and Instructions*, Ch. LVIII - Further Counsels to the Sisters of the Novitiate, p.364.

to absorb all human feeling, in particular because as the superior was divided from the inferior by the concrete marks of rank as well as enjoyment of certain privileges, a friendship in the common sense of the word was not likely to exist.

As the superior represented God to the whole house, obedience to her wishes had to be instant and unthinking; she was commonly addressed kneeling. It is unlikely that Rondeau or Lamourous expected extreme signs of reverence, and from the account given by Roger Guitraud it seems likely that subsequent mothers superior of the refuge of Bordeaux also refrained from enforcing the formality of the convent in this regard.²⁵ This did not mean that no distinctions at all were drawn. Lamourous called herself the head of the family (*chef de famille*), a male rather than a female title, and she expected to be obeyed as such:

For the happiness of the penitents, the house had to be one single community. In families...there are two kinds of people, two very different kinds! [Wrote the celibate abbé Guitraud.] In the eyes of the children, who are all dependence and fragility, the father and mother are superior beings, impeccable, infallible. It is they who have the power and authority. And yet this strength and this weakness, these kings and these subjects live in the same home, are brought together in the same life. It must be so, for the sake of the girls and boys who will one day be adults later on, in their turn.²⁶

The writer knew that in normal life children must some day emerge from infancy, yet he does not connect this with the needs of the infantilised penitents in a refuge. He easily accepts that adult penitents were expected to play the part of humble children vis-à-vis those in authority over them until their lives' end. Such women were never raised to the status of adults "in their turn", however long their residence. The nuns at least were eligible for promotion within the convent hierarchy, and at all times possessed the status of a mother with regard to any of the penitents. Guitraud, who had access to archives in the Bordeaux and Laval houses, wrote that despite the close contact maintained between penitents and sisters "the true religious spirit flourished at Laval just as at Bordeaux." This appears to mean that the ranking system maintained in the

²⁵ R. Guitraud, *La Spiritualité: l'esprit de la fondation Lamourous*, typed, undated, for private circulation. He wrote it between 1965 and 1970. Arch. of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux at Pian.

²⁶ Guitraud, p.46.

two provincial refuges was not so very different from that within a Bon Pasteur convent; it was rather a matter of degree.

For St Mary Euphrasia obedience was the purer if it were given blindly, and in this she followed the revered teaching of St Ignatius:

Let us convince ourselves that all orders of a superior are just; by a sort of blind obedience let us reject every idea, every feeling against his wishes...let all be convinced that those who live in obedience must allow themselves to be led...through the medium of their superiors, like a corpse which allows itself to be turned and positioned in every way, or again like a stick which is used...in all sorts of ways...²⁷

Odile Arnold found that the theme of this passage was supported by the Sulpician L. Tronson (1622-1700), many editions of whose works were adapted for the use of religious congregations in nineteenth century France.²⁸ The justification of the reduction of the inferior to the status of a machine was that by her obedience she might be completely cured of self-will and so enjoy interior peace, placing the responsibility for her actions on the superior, to whom, as to God, she stood in the relation of a small child. Naturally the forced channelling of affection upwards added to the strength of this position. If the superior had a caring nature she might find herself loved by her daughters almost extravagantly. The platitude that female congregations are full of jealousy and backbiting most probably exists because of the misery that slight marks of favour or disfavour can arouse in those who are all competing for the notice of one woman. Odile Arnold comments on the danger of this situation for those who live in it too long:

But it is certain that the organisation of the convent, the conception of obedience which prevailed there, even the name of "mother" superior, favoured such relations. On one hand, the superiors were encouraged to burn with quasi-maternal love towards those in their care; on the other, the "daughters" were kept always within a childlike relationship to those above them; the development of adult love might in such cases be hindered permanently, and with it the ability to come to terms with adult life.²⁹

²⁷ St Ignatius de Loyola, *Exercices spirituels, traduit en français par l'abbé Clément*, Avignon, 1835, p.257.

²⁸ Arnold, *Le corps et l'ame*, pp. 48,49.

²⁹ Arnold, p.III.

The harm that such an environment might do to girls hoping to leave the refuge and return to their families, or to outside employment, is obvious: they would have been made too vulnerable to domination, less able to think for themselves than they had been before they entered the refuge.

If a newly-arrived penitent found the various disciplines of convent life painful, she would not be allowed to forego them, but at least their significance would be explained to her. In France, according to Arnold, *la dévotion du siècle* was mortification, the killing of selfwill. The Dictionnaire de Spiritualité calls it "indispensable to the Christian life; well understood, it pacifies and liberates." *The Imitation of Christ*, one of Christianity's foundation texts, translated into French for the first time by Lamennais in 1824; it sold well and was frequently reissued. The writer declares that "there is no other road to life, to true inward peace, but the road of the cross, of dying daily to self."³⁰ The whole chapter encourages the reader to look for suffering because by bearing it with patience he will become like the Saviour. The examples given suggest that daily life alone, lived unselfishly, will furnish trials enough, but in the last century the idea that suffering in itself is good was already hallowed by tradition. *The Imitation's* reassurance that "The more the flesh is weakened by suffering, the more is the spirit strengthened by means of inward grace", had been construed to mean that self-inflicted punishments automatically improved the soul. St Ignatius believed this to be true; in his eyes mortification was the necessary condition of the life of faith and the degree to which he practised it was the measure of a man. St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul considered that one must mortify or put to death oneself every day. The means by which one should do so, of course, are the crux of the matter. Within the convent, mortification was not only carried out by the exercise of patience and charity in one's dealings, but concretely by systematised fasting and the use of "the instruments of penance", such as the whip, the hair shirt, the wearing of chains or belts studded with nails next to the skin, etc. Other mortifications

³⁰ Th. à Kempis, *The Imitation*, Book II, Ch.12, sect.3.

might be made out of very little things which were hard to do, like a strict control of the eyes. The latter was a traditional form of self-discipline very often practised in the Miséricorde de Laval, according to a former inmate, because it could be carried on all day. The eyes were never permitted to look elsewhere but at one's prayerbook, food or work, and at one's feet, so as not to fall over things. This mortification was usually offered to God by devout girls in order to bring his blessing on someone else. Such rigid control was beyond the strength of the newcomer or the uncommitted.³¹ The "*grandes mortifications*" were usually carried out by the sisters, although the penitents might perform them also, with the permission of the mother superior. The Magdalens of the Bon Pasteur houses, who had been penitents, were expected to lead very mortified lives. St Mary Euphrasia told her novices that they should not hesitate to perform

...even heroic acts of virtue...Mother Mary of St Chantel who for long was subjected to very dangerous temptations against faith, performed extraordinary acts when the trial was greatest. One day, in particular, she engraved upon her breast with a red hot iron the names of Jesus and Mary³²

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A development of the idea of mortification was the reparatory adoration offered to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This was inspired by the desire to compensate for the treasons and outrages committed by sinners against the majesty of God, particularly during revolutionary periods, and took its greatest impulse from the revelations made to a Visitandine nun of Paray-le-Monial, Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, (1647-1690) who was beatified by Pius IX in 1864. The homage paid to her in France was another example of the desire of its catholic population to look for guidance to the seventeenth century. It also implied a concern to remedy the evils of the time, a willingness to

³¹ Oral testimony by Mlle Gilberte, resident and former penitent of the Miséricorde de Laval. See recorded interviews in Appendix IV.

³² *Conferences and Instructions of Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier*, Ch.LVIII;"further counsels to the Sisters of the Novitiate", p.364. Mother M. of St Chantel was the former Mme Cesbron de la Roche, a widow and close friend of the Mother General.

participate in the sufferings of the Saviour and to feel oneself responsible, with him, for the salvation of the world. In the nineteenth century, particularly in France, groups, families and even states consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart.³³ Unfortunately this generous desire did not inspire attempts to create social justice but the performance of individual and corporate acts of penance, leaving the initiative for change in the hands of God.

An example from the life of a junior nun, which the Mother General of the Bon Pasteur presented for the admiration of her novices, illustrates the interpretation of deliberate suffering which the idea of reparation created, as well as the "happy ending" which was always attached to anecdotes such as this. It concerned:

One of our young sisters...Sister Mary of St Domitilla who died at Avignon in 1841. That poor child had received very little education, but her gentleness and humility captivated all hearts...

The founding of the refuge of Avignon (1839) was beset with difficulties: meagre support from the people, the apparent indifference of the bishop and to cap everything the Rhône overflowed its banks in 1840, forcing the nuns to evacuate the convent. This was followed by a period of great poverty.

...during the awful time of the flood she showed herself to be mistress of every adversity. After the disaster many of the sisters suffered very much. Several of them grew bitter and irritable. The mother superior, unable to make the slightest correction, groaned before God. Our little Sister Mary of St Domitilla, seeing this, [with the permission of her confessor] offered herself as a victim to the good God that he might make her sisters happier.

One day she was missing all morning long. The sisters searched for her everywhere, and found her in choir, kneeling in what appeared to be an ecstasy...her face aglow.

The ecstatic experience was repeated several times and after this it was noticed that the girl was wasting away. Soon she developed dropsy, a painful illness lasting four months. She bore all her sufferings "with unalterable patience", while the other nuns competed with one another to care for her. The doctor performed three operations,

³³ In the present century an Austrian sister of Notre Dame du Bon Pasteur d'Angers successfully requested Pope Pius X to consecrate the whole world to the Sacred Heart.

each of which was agony for the victim, but she actually looked forward to his visits and "trembled with joy when he entered the room", such was her desire for pain. The nuns who witnessed the progress of this illness were deeply impressed:

...the very sight of the little sister inspired devotion. The mother superior noted each day the wonderful change in the sisters. Once again they were docile, devoted and more perfect..When she [Mary of St Domitilla] received the last sacraments she was carried away with transports of love...she spoke aloud to God, begging Him to accept her sacrifice....She also offered reparation for all sins committed against the vows...an hour later...she exclaimed "It is finished. I die entirely consumed." After her last breath she remained so beautiful that for three days the sisters did not dare to bury her [in case she was only in a coma]..One thing I can assure you is that since her death the convent at Avignon...is a model of religious regularity and abnegation.³⁴

It is obvious that the sick nun was performing a Christlike role in her own eyes, for she used one of his last words on the cross - "It is finished." - in her final moments of consciousness. Ten years later the Avignon refuge began to prosper, a phenomenon which the Mother General attributed to the merits of Sister Mary Domitilla rather than to any improvement in material circumstances or the efforts of the living. Had "the little sister" taken her life by violence, in despair over some private grief, she would have been buried without ceremony in unconsecrated ground and presumed damned; as it was, her death-wish brought her into a state recognised as saintly by her colleagues because she had allied it to the image of the innocent victim, the holocaust which is "entirely consumed."

It is possible to see from this example the kind of role-model which was considered the ideal, but how was it possible for those concerned to avoid the conclusion that a god who responded to such a sacrifice was pleased by nothing so much as the torture of those who loved him? One of Thérèse Rondeau's biographers writes with admiration of the way in which this terrible god answered the prayers of his servant with regard to some of her penitents:

*Coral*y, after several years at the Miséricorde, felt a keen desire to leave this asylum, despite the wishes of her estimable family which was happy to know that

³⁴ *The Secret of the Sanctity*, etc. p.156, quoting one of St Mary Euphrasia's unpublished Instructions to her novices.

she was safe there from all danger. After Mother Thérèse had uselessly tried all the means of persuasion that normally succeeded, she said: "Very well, my daughter, God can do what I cannot. I shall beg him to stop you."

Shortly afterwards this girl was struck with a nervous illness which consisted in a continual trembling of all her limbs, and which made her reflect with such good effect that she ceased to demand her freedom. Little by little the physical illness worked a happy change in the naturally difficult nature of this penitent....*Coraly* became the invalid, nicknamed by our foundress her little *tremblante*, whom one still sees today in the infirmary, and who loves to tell newcomers...of this stroke of merciful justice. . She blesses the memory of her to whom she attributes the event which stopped her, and wishes the same fate to any among her companions who, unlikely to find salvation out in the world, still obstinately desire to re-enter it.³⁵

The narrator of this anecdote, who was chaplain to the Miséricorde at the time, had so thoroughly internalised his beliefs that he obviously saw nothing questionable in the fate of the wretched *Coraly*. All refuges in this study had penitents who stayed on into old age; their fidelity was taken as a sign of contentedness, but the story of *Coraly*, whose case was not unique, shows that there might have been a good deal of fear connected with the displeasure of a saintly mother superior. As mentioned, the narrator of this anecdote was chaplain to the refuge, seemingly chaplain both to the penitents and to the staff. His supervision would have been one of the ways in which the local bishop kept an eye on what went on inside the refuge, and the same would have been true of other, similar houses. If the chaplain also combined with his duties that of ecclesiastical superior, he would have been theoretically able to control the actions of the reverend mother. The evidence available shows that in the case of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, the ecclesiastical superior and the chaplain appointed by the Ordinary were not always acceptable to the female hierarchy, and the same is true of the Refuge Sainte Anne in the closing years of the century. Whatever differences of opinion occurred, however, they do not appear to have had anything to do with spiritual exercises or acts of penance, but with questions of money and power. Although the various nuns' chaplains must have had an intimate knowledge of the spiritual climate inside the convent, it was not possible to find evidence that any of them considered it unhealthy from the point of view of the doctrines taught to the girls in

³⁵ Le Segretain du Patis, *Vie de la Mère Thérèse, etc.*, p.520.

care. Certainly Bishop Angebeau believed that he had proof of tyranny over her nuns on the part of the Mother General of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, but the question fell into the categories already mentioned, concerning the use of money or power. The bishop never appears to have complained that the inmates of the convent were encouraged to court sickness or death for the sake of their salvation.

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Taking all the above into consideration, it is not hard to imagine the sense of alienation endured by new penitents as they tried to adapt to the other-worldly reality of their environment. For some the conditions of life outside had been so hard, and possibly their sexual experiences so humiliating, that the quietness, security and absence of men within the refuge made it a beneficial environment to them. For others a desire to escape damnation had been a serious motive for seeking admission, and they were perhaps already convinced that, by offending against the "*vertu délicat*" of chastity, they had done great and lasting damage to the health of their souls. To them the severity of the rules of the house, interpreted through the doctrine of reparation, must have appeared beneficial, for the difficulty of obeying them gave each girl a chance to make satisfaction before the almighty Judge for the countless sins that she had committed during life in the world.

Conventual life was traditionally likened to martyrdom, which was why any girl from a respectable family who wanted to enter religion was carefully questioned about her vocation before being accepted. The penitents were driven by necessity, committed to the refuge by their parents or guardians, or in the case of the Bon Pasteur houses placed inside by the state. *They* were not asked to go home and consider whether what they were doing was God's will or not. If they found the life hard, other girls who had been there for years tried to persuade them to go on with it, or they might have interviews with their class mother or the chaplain, or, in cases of obstinacy, with the mother superior herself. Whatever these counsellors may have said, it is certain that

they would have pointed the girl towards one person in heaven who was not concerned to weigh her merits. Mary was at the heart of the house, waiting for all who would come and lay their troubles at her feet.

It is difficult for those brought up within a protestant culture to understand the deeply felt love, gratitude and confidence which a Catholic heart can feel towards the mother of God. She who never performed a miracle or gave a single teaching while on earth is much easier to identify with than the stern and suffering figure of her son. Judgment belongs to him, whom all have offended; love and mercy belong to Mary. It may not be so biblically, but it was so in the reality of the refuge. To St Alphonso di Liguori Mary was the embodiment of feminine tenderness and pity, the mother that all would wish to have had. Beside the severe, life-denying teaching of the Church, the image of Mary stands, smiling reassurance:

The Divine Mary, all-holy in her pure Conception, ever immaculate, ever virgin, the true Mother of God, the Daughter of the Éternal Father, the Bride of the Holy Spirit, Queen of Angels, Empress of Heaven and Earth, my very dear, very admirable, very faithful Mother in God alone and for God alone, my hope, my life and my sweetness.³⁶

The quotation is from re-edition of a work of Henri-Marie Boudon, a seventeenth-century preacher, a favourite author of Thérèse Rondeau. Liguori taught that Mary was the necessary mediator between the soul and Christ, that "At the command of Mary all obey, even God."

"Have mercy on me, my Lord," she seems to say. "This poor soul that is in sin is my daughter, and therefore pity, not so much her as me, who am her Mother." Would that all sinners had recourse to this sweet mother for then certainly all would be pardoned by God!³⁷

The emphasis on the swift mercy of Mary counterbalanced the severity of the doctrines

³⁶ Henri-Marie Boudon, *Dieu Seul, ou Association pour l'Intérêt de Dieu Seul*, Perisse Frères, Paris and Lyons, 1821, p.5.

³⁷ St A. di Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, trans. by the Rt.Rev. Robert A. Coffin, London, Burns and Oates, 1868, p.48.

on the awfulness of sin, and so did the use of frequent communion, a practice well under way by the middle of the century. A merciful and influential priest, who in his youth had hoped to see catholicism reconquer France by love rather than fear, considered it a sovereign remedy for the soul under stress. It was "the bread of angels which allows the faithful soul to live a double life" in the world and in the inner sanctuary. Taken faithfully it would sustain "the sweet power of the mysteries of love" over the rebellious heart.³⁸

Images of Mary were everywhere in the refuge; in a niche in the corridor, over an archway leading into a courtyard, in the dormitory set over the light that was always burning there, and of course, in the chapel and the infirmary. The visions of Mary given to Catherine Labouré in 1830 inspired medals celebrating the Virgin's influence over the whole earth, and after the publication of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 even more emphasis was given to visible representations of her power. A copy of a very popular image was ordered in 1866 by the Bonne Mère Rondeau for her new chapel, where it may be seen today in the position of honour, over the altar. The figure of the Virgin is more than life size, standing alone, with no baby in its arms, on a starry globe which rests upon clouds.³⁹ Under one bare foot the serpent of evil is pinned down, a small, passive reptile, nothing like St George's dragon. The crescent moon is behind the Virgin, literally behind, for this image is sculptured or cast in several pieces. The whole group is placed within an alcove whose clear background sets off the white-robed figure, partially draped with the traditional blue mantle, casually worn. Mary is shown smiling, with arms held a little away from the body as if she were poised to step off the globe and down into the church. Despite the symbols of her greatness, she looks human and approachable. In the enclosed female world of the refuge, what was more suitable than that the power of God should

³⁸ Philippe Gerbet, *Considérations sur le Dogme Générateur de la Piété Catholique*, Paris, 1867, p.67.

³⁹ The image of the mother and child might have aroused memories of sexual love in some of the penitents, therefore it was not chosen for the altar, or so I was told by a clerical source in Laval.

be represented by a woman?⁴⁰ To those who spent their lives there, women were the inhabitants of the world, men the brief visitors, possessed of authority but scarcely known. As if to confirm this, in the chapel at Laval the central figure of Mary is flanked by two smaller statues, one at each side, of Jesus and the Magdalen.



"The prospect of being kindly treated when ill and of dying a holy, happy death at the Good Shepherd is a powerful attraction for our children, particularly those who are delicate," said Mother Pelletier.⁴¹ If daily life in the refuge was hard and lonely, dying in the refuge was a time of togetherness, when the sick girl was sustained through the agonies of a terminal illness without modern drugs by an entourage drawn from all levels within the house. Apart from the nurse and the chaplain she might receive visits from other sisters, the mother superior and girls from her own particular group, who would be allowed to pray around her body when it was exposed before burial. These people formed an audience and a support group for the dying girl. They expected to find an example in her, encouraging her to offer all her pain to God, perhaps for the benefit of an unconverted friend or relation. They admired her patience if she were able to bear her trial uncomplainingly, and frequently gave her messages for the blessed Virgin or Jesus. "A good death was seen as a sort of religious consecration which completed the gift of oneself to God."⁴² and covered a multitude of sins. Here is a description of the sort of thing that, when it or something like it really occurred, transformed a scene of doleful piety into a confirmation of faith:

[A postulant of 17 is dying; her mother writes.] Soon a heavenly smile played over her lips;...her face took on a lively expression. Everyone present fixed her with looks of amazement. Eléonore lifted loving eyes to heaven, sighed...tried to

⁴⁰ The chapel at the Abbotsford house of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Melbourne also has a copy of this image. The congregation is part of the Oceania Province of N.D. du Bon Pasteur. (The order no longer calls itself "d'Angers", although the mother house is still there.)

⁴¹ *Practical Rules for the use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes*, Angers, 1898, p.160.

⁴² Arnold, *Le corps et l'âme*, p.274.

rise, eagerly held out her arms then fell back on her couch. What had happened?...We did not dare to ask, but we knew that she repeated in tones of ecstasy "I have seen him, my Jesus! Oh, how beautiful he was!" The nursing sister thought at first that she was delirious...[The girl's confessor arrived and the patient responded reverently to his prayers for the dying. Then closing her eyes, she began a well-known prayer, "Souvenez-vous O Vierge Marie..."] and she stopped. Her face assumed an expression of serenity, truly celestial. It seemed to shine....Everyone there was amazed, they did not dare to disturb her;...but after a long while they drew near to see if perhaps she was sleeping...⁴³

The happy girl had known a sheltered childhood; she had given back to God, said her mother, a soul as pure as on the day she was baptised.

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Within its own value system the refuge gave ample opportunity for those with spiritual awareness to devote themselves to the community and to heaven. What seems unfortunate to modern eyes is that although the houses mostly took in adolescents and children, many of whom were only guilty of being in need of moral protection, these too were exposed to the same metaphysical messages as their seniors, and like them were also cloistered. The convent was truly a prison to the very young. It appears that those in authority in the refuge had no appreciation of the vulnerability of childhood. Although care was taken to ensure that the orphans and preservatives worked, ate and slept separate from the penitents proper, so as to preserve them from moral pollution, there is no indication that these children were spared the pessimistic view of themselves as part of doomed humanity, whose deceiving heart is desperately wicked. There is also no evidence that the rules forbidding touching and caressing were ever relaxed in favour of the youngest. How much guilt these children must have absorbed from their elders, guilt confirmed by refectory lectures and Lenten sermons! Rather than fortifying them against temptation, the spiritual teaching within the refuge may have convinced the girls, old and young, that they were bound to fail morally in whatever they attempted, thus *lowering* their will to resist sexual exploitation when or if they

⁴³ Arnold, *Le corps et l'ame*, from the biography of Eléonore de Gaulmyn, p.280.

returned to the world. For Augustinian and Thomist theology presume that in human nature, mortally wounded by original sin, the will is almost powerless to struggle against concupiscence; it can only hope for the help of divine grace. When considering how the various disgraced or unfortunate subjects of the refuge saw themselves it seems therefore fair to conclude that they did not need to be taught humility, for even the most rebellious or cynical of the older women were probably subconsciously convinced of their utter worthlessness. The marginalisation they had endured outside, because of their illicit sexual experience, was not an unsuitable preparation for life inside the refuge, and its exaltation of early death as the most worthy offerings a poor sinner could make to God.

Chapter VII - The penitents

One knows in general to whom you open your doors....Among your boarders the eldest seek refuge in the shadow of the cloister or sometimes are brought to you by the police, after years of vice and disorder, ignorant of any trade, incapable of any work because they have dragged out their existence in an idleness...which has often been the cause of their fall. The youngest come mostly from a disadvantageous background and are entrusted to you because their natures have shown themselves to be, up till then, amenable to evil and resistant to discipline.¹

Joseph Rumeau, bishop of Angers.

Although the marginalised and disgraced girls and women taken into their care formed the very *raison d'être* of the convent refuges, published accounts give a very inadequate idea of who these subjects were or by what circumstances they were brought to the cloister. So far, no nineteenth-century journals or autobiographies of former penitents have come to light, and are unlikely to do so, as most girls of the poorest class were barely literate for most of the century. Biographies of the foundresses, apart from that of Mme de Combé which says nothing on this subject, invariably present the penitents superficially through a few pathetic anecdotes, usually ending in deathbed scenes. These stereotypes give no idea of the actual character of individual girls. Again, whereas the poverty of the various foundations is dwelt on, so as to present their survival as directly linked to divine providence, the much greater poverty of the social class from which the girls came is not mentioned. There is no suggestion that material circumstances may have driven the penitents to seek shelter, nor that their sexual disgrace might have come about against their wishes. Indeed the subject of their previous lives is passed over so rapidly, even in the case of the girls who had been placed in care as being only in moral danger, that it is very hard to find clear evidence that any of the girls had engaged in prostitution at all. The usual form of words describing the function of the refuge represents it as "welcoming young girls fallen into

¹ From an open letter to the Mother General of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers published in *Le Journal de Maine et Loire*, 1 December, 1899.

disorder and dishonour" or "providing a shelter open to girls who, penetrated with regret for their straying from the path, desire to withdraw from the world for a time."² References in public archives to registered prostitutes having spent time in a refuge are rare.³ Evidence of it is to be found in specialised works, such as *Prostitution dans la ville de Paris* and the chapters appended to it in the 1857 edition, in which refuges in Paris and various provincial cities including Laval and Bordeaux are described plainly as places which took in repentant prostitutes in the full meaning of the word. We also know from the brochure *Les Madeleines Repenties* by Dumas the Younger that Thérèse Chupin's house was opened for prostitutes; in fact the title says so clearly since the name "*madeleine*" is a poetic term signifying a converted whore. With regard to the Bon Pasteur d'Angers there are two private letters in texts published this century, in which women who were to be taken in are referred to as coming from a brothel⁴ and as *filles*.⁵ According to Parent Duchâtelet, writing in 1837, and Dr Homo of Chateau Gontier forty years later, the registered prostitutes whom they encountered knew about the life inside a refuge and could quote rules and regulations, showing that they had certainly made use of these places but had not been persuaded to stay, or to give up their trade.

Apart from receiving such women, for whose benefit they had been founded, we also know that the houses of N. D. de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers accepted young girls who had lived "in a state of moral vagabondage"⁶ and who had been judged guilty of sexual misdemeanour under sections 66 and 67 of the Penal Code. All the refuges in this study, despite constitutions which emphasized that subjects must come of their own

² Le Segretain de Patis, *Vie de la Mère Thérèse*, p.263.

³ For instance, only one mention of a girl having spent time in a refuge was found in the archives of the Paris Préfecture. In the municipal archives of Laval too, only one reference was found, that of a girl arrested for prostitution in 1857 said that she had lived "in repentance" at Laval and had left of her own volition because "she could not get used to it." Arch. Dépt. de la Mayenne, U.5445. Dr. Homo, in *La Prostitution à Ch. Gon.*, p.18, found that only five out of 293 women between the years 1849 to 1862 had asked to be struck off the police list of registered prostitutes because they had entered a convent refuge.

⁴ *Letters of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier*, p.205, letter from Sr. Mary of St Dosithea, 1 September 1837.

⁵ Letter from Bishop Flaget, cited on p.36 of Chapter V

⁶ Quotation from an article by Senator Paul Strauss in *Le Signal* of 8 April 1905.

free will, took in girls whose families had placed them there "in correction" for a certain period because of behaviour which might lead them into public disgrace. Because of this Jacques Termeau concluded that although a refuge might begin with a few repentant prostitutes sharing their lives with the foundress, as the establishment grew (or became less personal in its administration) very few subjects came in voluntarily straight off the streets.⁷ Female children in moral danger also formed part of the penitent population of all refuges by the end of the century, although St Marie Euphrasie's foundations were the first to undertake their care in large numbers.

This summary allows the girls in the refuges to be seen a little more clearly. There must always have been a percentage of sexually experienced women among them, whose presence showed that they had failed to find continued support from men even by trading sexual favours. Such women would have arrived with severe emotional trauma, whether they had been prostitutes or not; they would have been most vulnerable to suggestions of their own guilt and lack of worth. The same would have been true of children who had been brutalised, sexually abused or neglected within families under stress. At a time when childbirth was much more dangerous than it is today, many men were left as widowers with young children. A well-known doctor of Laval, Jean-Baptiste Bucquet, made his own lists of births, deaths and marriages in the city from 1819 to 1843. His figures show that marriages between widowers and young women were frequent, approximately one in ten of the total, whereas remarriage for a widow was very rare.⁸ The Mayenne is not the whole of France, but Bucquet's findings at least suggest that the average refuge would have contained a percentage of girls from families where a young stepmother had done her best to get rid of a "difficult" older daughter of the previous marriage, or at least to dispose of her until her eighteenth birthday, the time given in many anecdotes when a family would collect a girl put in against her will.⁹ The

⁷ *Les Prostituées et la Vénéralité Sexuelle dans le Centre-Ouest de la France*, p.351.

⁸ Archives de la Mayenne, 186J/26. The death rate for widows was appreciably higher than that of their male counterparts.

⁹ Nurit mentions "a girl put in by her stepmother who described her as a monster of evil [méchanceté]. She lived a life of great humility and prayed to die at eighteen, which she did, three days after her birthday." From *Vie de la Mere Th.*, p.296.

rejection experienced by such girls would have reinforced the sense of guilt created by the spiritual teaching of the convent. In fact it was not a place in which those who still had a little self-confidence or a little hope would have felt at home; rather, these signs of life would have been rebuked. This leaves us with an image of the the core members of the various classes, women who had decided to stay permanently in the house, as on the whole, a group of serious timid females, prone to despair. Mother Pelletier often told her novices of the young penitent "Always silent and in tears...[who] could not be consoled for having offended God...'Oh Mother,' she said, 'I feel my grief will kill me; only death will end my sorrow for having offended my Saviour.'" In fact the girl did not live long and died "leaving her companions a most edifying memory."¹⁰

Anecdotes that demonstrate the presence of a death-wish in one or other of the penitents are found in publications regarding all the foundations covered in this study. They are enthusiastically presented by the authors as evidence of sincere religious conversion and perfect repentance, particularly as the girls' prayers had been answered by God, for they did fall sick and die just as they had hoped:

How many times have I not seen children demanding insistently from God that they may die before their majority if, as soon as they are released, they are bound to lose their souls? This prayer has been granted to many, although nothing showed outwardly that they were so near death.¹¹

One has seen them fighting valiantly against the attractions of pleasure and independence, against the mirages of imagination, against dangerous memories....they multiply novenas to obtain a holy death, and pass to God with peace in their hearts.¹²

Anxieties such as these would have been particularly painful to a sincerely converted girl who found the convent discipline almost too much for her, especially if she were homesick as well. Marc Nurit records the case of a girl who was taken against her will

¹⁰ *Conferences and Instructions*, Ch. LIX, p.367/8.

¹¹ F. Fruchaud, article in *La Semaine Religieuse d'Angers* of July 1899. Fruchaud was a chaplain at the Bon Pasteur d'Angers.

¹² J.B. Terrien, S.J., *Notice sur la Congrégation de Notre Dame de la Miséricorde*, (of Laval) Paris, M.R. Leroy, undated brochure, either late 19th or early 20th century, p.27. Father Terrien had some privileged position with regard to the refuge, possibly that of confessor extraordinary. I could not obtain any details of him from either the Miséricorde de Laval or the archives of the évêché, despite the kind efforts of the bishop's archivist, Père Rimbault.

"from an unworthy home" at the age of 15 and put into the Miséricorde de Laval. She took the separation from her family very hard but settled in at last. "When her three years were up" her parents came to collect her but she refused:

She ran back to her class, laughing and crying at the same time, and the other girls joined in her emotion. She had resolved to live and die like St Louis de Gonzague [a teenage saint]. She did die, her health being weakened by the death of the Bonne Mere, to whom she had given all her love."¹³

When dying she remembered what it had cost her to say "no" to her natural mother. The registers of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux show that even after leaving some penitents returned later and asked to be readmitted, in order to ensure their salvation. In most cases these women are found to have remained in the refuge until death.

This fear of the outside world cannot be attributed solely to convent residence, but also indicated how difficult life outside had been for some. Julie Daubié in *La Femme Pauvre* frequently alludes to the suicide of young working women who were faced with destitution, or had been abandoned by their seducers.¹⁴ Within the refuge, in some cases, the suicidal drive was allowed to express itself formally by the making of novenas to obtain an early death. The justification for the permission was that given by Fruchaud: the girl feared that in time she would deny her conversion and return to her old habits, with inevitable damnation to follow. This anxiety would have been particularly painful to a converted girl who found the convent discipline almost too much for her.

As well as a certain number of girls who internalised the values of the refuge to the point of morbidity, their counterparts also existed, whose conviction of guilt took the form of hatred and denial of the teaching they received. Every foundress' biographer mentions that evil rumours were spread by such as these regarding the poor conditions inside the refuge, which they had left because they could not stand the

¹³ Nurit, *Vie de la Mere Th.*, p.310.

¹⁴ Julie V. Daubié, *La Femme Pauvre*, Guillemin et Cie, Paris, 1866.

discipline. In a letter asking for alms addressed to the Duchesse d'Angouleme in 1821, Thérèse Rondeau said:

of all the girls who enter the house some only stay for completely human reasons...and sometimes wish to leave before conversion. Such girls are so much the more to be feared as, wishing to justify their conduct, they invent enverything that the rage of hell can suggest, mostly against their directress, causing much pain, calumny and trouble.¹⁵

This was one reason for giving the penitents house names after entry: it prevented those who left from advertising the family names of those still inside.

Every convent refuge also contained a large number of older, stable subjects who had been convinced for years that the world outside was well lost. The love they were encouraged to feel for the others and their active co-operation with the nuns was the strength of the house, for

in order to obtain a really good result it is necessary that each class contain a strong contingent of respected penitents, solidly virtuous, who will assimilate the newcomer and work her into their own image.

Certainly a number of women and girls discovered within themselves a vocation for the religious life. The writer quoted above wished to assure the public that "It is not rare to find among these humble penitents the merits and the virtues of a good nun." It was probably through the care they received from such committed women from their own social class, that the newcomers were able to see the refuge community as their own family, particularly in the case of the smaller foundations. For many of them it was the only family they were likely to have and could provide a powerful motive for staying.

The nuns also had a psychological advantage ready-made by the custom of referring to the penitents as children, whereas those who were in charge of them, however young, were called mothers or mistresses. The infantilisation of the disgraced girls and women was strengthened by a deliberate ignorance of all that they may have done or suffered in their former lives. Where the Congregation of the Bon Pasteur

¹⁵ From the transcript of part of a Mémoire to the Duchesse d'Angouleme, archives of the Miséricorde de Laval.

d'Angers is concerned, the practice of subjecting offenders to childish punishments reduced the penitents to the level of boarding school girls. It was extremely effective, for who could complain of it? Yet who could resist it, except by leaving, and permission to leave was not lightly given in any of the establishments in this study, except perhaps that run by Chupin. The following is the evidence given at Mother Pelletier's canonisation process by a *Consacrée*, a penitent who had earned membership of a special guild within the generalate from which auxiliary supervisors were drawn. Speaking of the foundress she said:

When Mother used to come to talk to us we were all transformed, as it were. And moreover this was not a passing impression. It bore lasting fruit. Many of us owed our perseverance to such visits. Our Mother used to speak to us with exquisite delicacy...always trying to raise us up...always repeating the assurance that we were dear to her...Our Mother had also a most remarkable knowledge of souls. How often did not one or other of the penitents beseech her to allow her to return to the world, renewing the request again and again, and our Mother would not consent. She would warn them kindly but firmly that their salvation depended upon their staying, that outside they would lose their souls eternally. Mother was always right, as those who were faithful to her warning learned. Some died happily in the fold; others are still here, consecrating the days of their life to the Lord.¹⁶

This passage shows how difficult it might be for a woman to leave, despite the fact that she was legally free to do so. Theoretically she might write to relatives asking for help - if she had any, and if the mother superior allowed her letter to be posted. She might, again in theory, address a complaint to the prefect or his agent, when the three-monthly inspection of the refuge was made in accordance with the decree of December 1810. However, evidence produced in the following chapter shows that the inspections were often not made. The penitent would then have no recourse but to make such a nuisance of herself that she was finally dismissed, with a bad name. In the case of the Miséricorde of Bordeaux, however, Guitraud claimed that Lamourous never kept a girl against her will beyond eight days,¹⁷ and one may assume that Rondeau followed her in this, yet a week of intense psychological pressure could be hard to bear in the case of

¹⁶ *The Secret of the Sanctity of St Mary Euphrasia*, p. 247.

¹⁷ Guitraud, *Mlle de Lamourous*, p.160.

one whose self-esteem was already low. We must assume that refuges always contained some penitents who had not been able to resist persuasion. A girl made to stay against her will might generate for years an atmosphere of frustration, irritation or despair.



The question of who the girls were and how they came to be in need of the refuge cannot be answered satisfactorily until at least one of the two major orders which did this work in France consents to open its archives to the social historian. In the present case it is possible to obtain a partial answer to the first question by an analysis of the data found in the registers of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux for the first 41 years of the last century. An attempt to suggest possible case histories follows this analysis, using a document found in the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Three modern testimonies, two from former inmates of a refuge and one from a religious sister are placed in an Appendix at the end of the book. Coming from the present century as they do, they are not offered as evidence of how penitents or religious felt in the previous one, but are there merely to show how the emotional climate of one refuge might differ from another, although the theology behind the enterprise was the same.

The registers of the Miséricorde de Bordeaux

The registers, in two volumes, cover the periods January 1800 to December 1824 and January 1825 to August 1841. A fine royalist motto, "*Vive Louis XVIII!*" begins Register I, despite the fact that Napoleon ruled France at the time. This book was kept by Mlle de Lamourous alone until her arthritis became so bad that she had to entrust the keeping of records to her niece and successor, Laure de Labordère. Lamourous made brief entries in small hurried script. Under the heading "*Sortie*", she not only noted the date on which a living penitent had left the community, but that on which a girl had died. As the sufferer's last moments were so important to her hope of salvation, the

note also included a brief description of these, such as "Died like a perfect Christian", the highest praise, or "as an excellent Christian", "as a good Christian", "with good sentiments" or, less admirable, "fortified by the sacraments" (*munie des sacraments*). In a very few cases she merely wrote the word "Dead".

The second register is drawn up by another, more elegant hand. Although the foundress did not die until September 1836, her writing does not appear in it. The column headings are as above, plus six more. One of these is for the women's "protectors". Four record the concrete marks of the girls' spiritual progress, namely the date of their baptism, confirmation, renewal of first communion, and whether or not they had entered the "Association of the Scapulary", presumably a group of the more pious among the penitents. There is a separate column for "The dates of their death and their dispositions at that hour." The column for parents' names is interesting because it includes the date of their decease, unlike Register I. This enables the social and economic circumstances of their daughters to be seen more clearly, for it appears that out of the total entry of 938 girls and women recorded in Register II, only 37.4% had both parents living at the time of admission. Of the rest, roughly another third had one parent still alive, with the mother most likely to be that one.¹⁸ One hundred and fifty-one girls, or 16%, had lost both parents and another 74 had been brought up in a paupers' hospital or a hospice for foundlings, with no knowledge of either parent. Very few girls are noted as being illegitimate, but a foundling (*enfant trouvé*) was considered to be a rung lower morally than an orphan because illegitimacy was assumed. However although Register I contains no details of parents' deaths, the circumstances of the times, a period in which France was first drained of money and manpower and then defeated and invaded by four allied armies, makes it likely that most of the penitents taken in between 1800 and 1824 were also from homes broken by death or desertion.

¹⁸ Parents who had been missing from birth were treated as deceased for the purpose of this summary.

Register II has almost twice as many entries as Register I, although the timespan covered is shorter. This must represent an ability to lodge more girls, brought about by substantial gifts of money or an increased ability to earn income.

The existence in Register II of the column for "protectors" shows that by 1825 many subjects had someone to sponsor them, who also supplied them with bedding. A few entries bear the note "returned to her protector", suggesting that in some cases the existence of this sponsor spared the girl from being put out onto the street. These people were also notified in the case of an independent exit or a death. Not every girl had a sponsor; of those who did most were sent to the Miséricorde by the sisters, mother superior or chaplain of a charitable institution. Several girls were given places after a request from the Mayor of Bordeaux or his deputies. The clergy of various parishes also sent in girls, and some were sponsored by a vicar or vicar general, one even by the Archbishop of Bordeaux himself. There were very few sponsors from private life and of these almost all were female, usually given the simple title "Madame". Only two sponsors came from the nobility, and these were also female. Some were designated by a brief note describing their station, i.e. "the mother of one of our girls", or, "a shopkeeper".

Most of the girls' parents originated from the country around Bordeaux but others had come from quite distant regions of France, such as Lille or Nice. Very few came from Paris. Parents of Spanish origin were frequently recorded. One unusual case was that of a little black girl, the daughter of two African slaves belonging to a certain Mme X. This girl was given to the Miséricorde in early childhood and then, when she was twelve, and presumably capable of exploitation, her wretched owner took her back again, "although the child was very sorry to leave".

The occupation of each entrant's father was noted in almost every case; the mother's less frequently. The predominating class was that of skilled labourers and small tradesmen, such as cooper, turner, sawyer, carter, ploughman, tiler and smith. The occupations of weaver, cobbler and small farmer (laboureur) are also often mentioned; there were also a few domestic servants, some pedlars, one or two actors

and a language teacher. In two cases the father's occupation was noted as "slave trader". "Vintner" appears frequently and so does "innkeeper". Some came from the higher walks of life: an architect, a landed proprietor, an inspector of police (*commissaire*). In these cases it is common to find the word "deceased" after the father's name. The mothers' occupations, where mentioned, were usually those of seamstress or farm worker.

The general picture is that of people in a small way of life, or of mothers and daughters who might once have belonged to the bourgeoisie, but who had been forced lower down the social scale through the death of the head of the family. Presumably they had already become isolated from relatives who might have helped them.

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In order to have some control over this material, the data on which the following information is based has been divided into age groups of five years, representing early childhood (5-9 yrs); late childhood (10-14 yrs) in which the menarche would most probably occur; adolescence (15-19 yrs), when most girls would reach their highest point of sexual attractiveness; early adult womanhood (20-24 yrs), when beauty and experience of the world may be used to greatest advantage; maturity (25-29 yrs), a time to consolidate whatever one has gained, or to admit that youth has been wasted. The last group, those of thirty years and over, represent women in early middle age, a condition which would be very apparent in those who had lived in poor conditions since childhood, without medical or dental care, especially if they had borne children.

The data was used to ask the questions: how long did the penitents stay? How did they leave? Were jobs found for them and if so, after how long? Were deaths frequent? Was there a predictable ebb and flow of the penitent population?

Although Register II (1825 to 1841) contains almost twice as many entries as Register I, both volumes show that the age group 15-19 yielded the highest number of entries, followed in descending order of importance by those of 20-24, 10-14 and 30

plus. Only 38 children between 5 and ten years old were accepted over the whole period (1800-1841) in which the total entry was 1,451 females. Sixty-four of these were omitted from analysis because the notes referring to them were too fragmentary to allow categorisation.

The house names allotted to newcomers were entered in a list at the back of each book, presumably so as to avoid repetition. Some of them are very pretty, a few seem absurd; the majority were simply women's names with no religious connotation.

The children - 5-9 years old - 38 subjects

Only two subjects in this age group came into the house before 1818. Of the total over the whole period none was dismissed, one was placed (found employment), eleven were returned to relatives, eight left independently, that is to say that their exits were simply noted by the word *sortie*, and eighteen died while in residence. Of the latter, eight did so after spending over 20 years in the house.

The girls - 10-14 years old - 217 subjects

In this group there was one dismissal during the whole 41-year period and only ten placements, of which five were made after the subjects had been in residence ten years or more. Very few girls left independently, only 35 over the whole period. Approximately one in four in this age group were taken back by relatives, all within the first five years of residence. This suggests that families allowed their "wayward girls" to stay in the Miséricorde's disciplined environment long enough to learn a useful skill and to be prepared for First Communion or renewal of First Communion vows, after which they were allowed a second chance at leading a normal family life. Although the legal age of majority was 21 year, almost all of those returning to family in this age group did so while they were still minors.

The death rate was high: roughly one in three of them died while in residence, usually in less than five years. Of those who survived longer than this, many remained in the house for the next ten or twenty years, and some for very much longer. One girl

of twelve who was accepted in October, 1820, died after 69 years as a penitent. Understandably, the younger the subject the more likely she was to be able to adapt to the conditions inside the Miséricorde, and it may be that the religious sisters and the *surveillantes* responded more kindly to the very young than they did to older girls, experienced in "disorder".

The adolescents - 15 - 19 yrs - 476 subjects

Entries in this group account for one third of the total taken in over the whole period. Employment was found for only 36 of them, often after a period of residence of several years. This may indicate caution on the part of the mother superior, who would not wish her house to be represented by any except girls of proven reliability. Even so, 36 out of 476 is less than one in twelve; in fact the records show that to be placed at all was regarded as a favour. A typical entry states: "N...By her good conduct in the house she merited being placed by the Bonne Mère." Register II, with a much higher intake of adolescent girls on record, shows only 17 placements, which suggests that the nuns had found that girls placed previously had not done well. A similar development shows up in the tables for returns to family.¹⁹ Register II has only three more entries under this heading than Register I. This may indicate that more pressure to stay was brought to bear on the girls in this age group after 1825, or that families were less willing to accept them back. Perhaps the public had observed that many of the adolescents sent out into the world in previous years had fallen into prostitution? The port city certainly contained a market for it. The girls who left the refuge could not avoid the stigma of having been part of a disgraced community, a fact which would have made people slow to employ them and quick to notice any faults in their behaviour.

With regard to independent exits, that is to say girls who apparently left with no family or job to go to, there were 135 of these over the whole period from this age group, almost all of them made less than 5 years after entry. Quite a few *sorties* are

¹⁹ I refer to my own tables whenever this word is used.

undated, which may mean that the relevant subject's stay was so brief that it was not considered worth noting in detail. Register II shows that relatively more 15-19 year-olds left the Miséricorde between 1825 and 1841 than in the previous 24 years, which suggests that discipline had become more severe in the later period, and there was certainly a greater degree of overcrowding to exacerbate poor living conditions.²⁰ Outside conditions were not more favourable, for from the 1820's into the 1850's the country was subject to severe economic crises.²¹

The mortality rate for this group was one in four, of whom most died between two and five years after entry. A higher percentage died in the early years of the century, possibly because the distress of the whole Bordeaux region affected the general health of the poor, or possibly because of the inability of the house to provide sufficient food for its inmates before it became fully self-supporting.

Young women - 20-25 years - 400 subjects

The intake of women in this age group more than doubled in the period covered by Register II, and yet they were the most likely to leave of their own volition. The figure for independent exits is 141, or 35% of the total intake for both registers, with slightly more falling in the period of the second register than in that of the first. The bulk of the exits occurred during the first year of residence.

A quarter of the whole entry died in the refuge, most of them after two to five years. Only 33 young women were returned to the care of their relatives over the whole 40-year period.

Forty subjects from this group were found outside employment. The period of probation was long: both registers show that few young women of less than five years' residence in the house were helped into a place.

²⁰ From 1824 the population grew by roughly one hundred penitents every five years, yet the refuge was in the urban centre and could only extend upwards, not outwards.

²¹ Roger Price, Poor Relief and Social Crisis in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France, *European Studies Review*, Vol.13, Oct.1983, p.423.

Deaths were relatively few; Register I shows only 27 deaths, most of which occurred in the first five years, while Register II records 41 deaths.

Only about one in four over the whole period not only survived the health hazards but who chose to stay longer than two years. This, considered in addition to the high number of independent exits, may be related to the fact that these women were young enough to find support in exchange for sex and experienced enough to know where to look for it.

Mature women - 25-29 years - 170 subjects

Register II shows a doubling of intake over that recorded in Register I. In both registers there is a high percentage of independent exits among the mature women, over half the total number. However they usually stayed over a year before returning to the world, and in many cases five years. Probably the hardships of life outside for a destitute woman on her own and approaching thirty, made staying within the refuge appear advantageous.

The death rate was just under one in five for the whole entry, again with most deaths taking place within the first five years of residence. Register I shows a higher death rate for this age group than Register II.

Only 17 out of the whole entry were placed in employment. Figures for returns to family are very small.

Older women - 30+ years - 79 subjects

Out of the small number of girls and women who were actually sent away, and apart from the tiny percentage who were made to leave because of mental illness or epilepsy, this age group has relatively the highest rate of dismissals.

Thirty-seven left independently, mostly before the first year was up. The fact that so many could not bear the discipline of the house even for a year suggests that in some ways the life in the convent was harder for them than for their juniors, for they had a stronger motive to stay than the younger women. Less likely to find employment in a

brothel or a cabaret, they needed the refuge for survival's sake, as well as to make their peace with God in what for many was the last decade of life. Twenty-six of the entry died while in residence, most of them after at least five years spent in the house.

The large amount of independent exits in this as well as the last two age groups may indicate that an addiction to alcohol had had time to develop, a condition which would have forced the women to leave in order to satisfy it. Again, as Parent-Duchâtelet suggested in *De La Prostitution*, in his chapter on the "repentance" of prostitutes, some women appeared to have developed a need for sexual stimulation which made celibacy painful to them.²² Indeed the emotional and physical needs of all the more experienced penitents must have cost them a great effort to repress; it is not surprising that many left, but rather that so many stayed.

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The small number of placements made over the forty-year period is surprising, even considering that the nuns preferred the girls not to return to the world. Perhaps there was not much demand for their services. After two or more years of sheltered life in the convent, where their whole day was organised for them and repeatedly broken up by meals, prayer or recreation at regular intervals, outside in the world even the most willing girl must have found it hard to work virtually alone all day, with no regular hours of rest. After saying in the previous chapter that the life in a refuge was bound to be depressing, because of its particular spiritual emphasis, it is necessary to say also that its timetable was positively a hindrance to girls wishing to rejoin normal society, particularly if the only job they could get was that of the lonely and exploited *domestique*.²³

²² Parent, *De la Prostitution*, last chapter of Vol. 2.

²³ See "La bonne", by Anne-Martine Fugier in *Misérable et glorieuse: la femme du XIXe siècle*, ed. J.P. Aron, Paris, 1980.

The word "prostitute" is not to be found in the Bordeaux registers; Lamourous drew a veil over her penitents' past. Therefore one might ask at this point, "Were these girls really prostitutes? What sort of sexual disgrace opened the doors of a refuge to them?" Unfortunately the registers give no help in determining what circumstances those girls and women of between 10 and 30 years came from before they applied for admission. The sisters did find out however that in three cases a girl or woman "did not deserve to be sent to us because she was good before entering". Is this an oblique way of indicating that the person in question was still a virgin and that they therefore knew that all the other penitents, however young, were not?

Some of them must have come from prison, as their sponsors are described as "the prison sisters", the name given to the Marie-Joseph order during its early years in Bordeaux. In other cases the entry to the refuge was followed by a short interval "at the Maternity", evidence of seduction at least.. In the case of girls from families where only the father was alive, the loss of the mother may have left the daughter unsupervised or alone at home for twelve to fourteen hours a day. An incident recorded in the municipal archives of Laval (unfortunately the only one of its kind) shows how one death might make the difference between respectability and disgrace for a working class family.

Mélanie Fleury

A letter of 4 October 1898 from the Mayor of Ombrières to the Prefect of Laval described the position of Eugène Fleury, a weaver of his canton, who had four or five children of whom one, Mélanie, aged 15, caused him a great deal of worry. Fleury was a widower in poor health, with no relatives in the district. He found it impossible to prevent his daughter from wandering round the countryside; sometimes she was away for three or four days. Fearing to see her become "*coupable*" (guilty), he wanted his daughter shut up. His poverty did not permit him to pay for her board, but he had made enquiries and heard that at Laval there existed a house which accepted girls like Mélanie for nothing.

The mayor asked the Prefect to help Fleury but the Prefect replied that he could not compel the Miséricorde to accept the girl; that nonetheless the Mother Superior was willing to take her without payment but that she could not say when, "for she has a great number of demands to which she has not yet been able to give satisfaction."²⁴ A similar case is recorded by Termeau, wherein the girls's mother told the magistrate "As I do not wish to be disbonoured by seeing her arrested (for prostitution) one day or another, I have come to ask you to have her shut up so as to reform her."²⁵

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Although she may not have been registered with the police, how did a girl like Mélanie Fleury live for the periods of three or or four days that she was absent from home? If her father could not find her a place in a house like the Miséricorde, what would become of her? By 1830 French law required that in the case of minors taken in the practice of prostitution, the girl's father had to be notified; if news of this leaked out the family would become the object of public scorn, a circumstance which would prejudice the chances of the other children when looking for work. It is likely that Eugène Fleury feared that Mélanie's behaviour would eventually lead to this. This indicates that even when a girl was put inside a refuge at her family's request, as being in need of supervision, she might have had experiences similar to those of the older girls who came in independently. With many, even as young as fifteen, the Bordeaux registers show that a month or two inside the house was all that they could stand, even if before entry they had had no sponsors, no parents and no money. Yet they chose to leave, friendless as they were, even in winter. How could homeless girls and young women obtain food, drink and shelter for the night in a large port city in nineteenth-century France, or in any other country for that matter? The answer is obvious.

²⁴ Arch. de la Dépt de la Mayenne, XI792, Dossier no. 3, "*Demande d'admission à la Misericorde de Laval, 1898.*"

²⁵ J. Termeau, *Les Prostituées*, etc. p.352.

In 1813 minutes of the council of the city of Bordeaux show that the police had recorded 2,600 newly registered prostitutes, a sign of the size of public demand and of the poverty of the region at that time. "Considering...not only that humanity requires that the unhappy victims of licentiousness be relieved, but that they also be sequestered from society until perfectly well", the council offered Lamourous 24,000frs a year for the establishment of a section for prostitutes sick with venereal disease, to be built inside the Miséricorde. The city spent one quarter of its revenues at that time on charitable establishments, and was about to rebuild the old paupers' hospital, but without replacing the section formerly allotted to public women, which had treated 100 of them per annum.²⁶ The council expected that Lamourous would be able to "exact" work from the six women which would supplement the annual grant, but she was not satisfied with this arrangement, and it came to nothing.²⁷ There is no record of any further action having been taken by the municipality to provide care for prostitutes with venereal disease, probably in part because the authorities were aware that some prostitute women used the Miséricorde for convalescence. A few lines in the 1857 edition of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, in the appendices dealing with the situation in some provincial cities, illustrate this. The writer was a Dr. J. Venot, Surgeon-in-Chief of the Hospice St Jean, which had a dispensary for the treatment of syphilis among prostitutes as well as a section for the cure of the disease among the civil population.

For twenty years (the doctor wrote) I have insisted...that a House of Convalescence be established...I have always received the reply that the Miséricorde effectively supplied the place of this innovation. Now, what is the Miséricorde? A holy and pious retreat where hygiene is sacrificed...to the practice of religion and to the most laborious manual work. The Miséricorde! It is a sort of prison-convent from which girls return to us, often seriously affected by a recurrence of the disease, after having been totally neglected...and worn down by bad food and overwork. Certainly the moral efforts made in this establishment by the worthy nuns who run it merit the highest praise, but the care needed to preserve health - cleanliness and convalescence - are totally unknown to them.

²⁶ Arch. Nat. Ff5 1420.

²⁷ She considered that the women should keep any money they earned, for they would have needs such as wine and tobacco which the Miséricorde could not supply. Verrier's *Positio* p. 211.

They impute to sin the least ablution...the bath is a worldly superfluity of which the name is never pronounced in the convent.²⁸

Venot's testimony, biased as it may be, shows that the house contained - at least since 1837 (the beginning of his "twenty years") - a number of women who came in weakened from syphilis. This corresponds with what Parent Duchâtelet found with regard to the Bon Pasteur of the rue de l'Enfer, that it was from young, sick prostitutes that the Paris refuge was able to recruit its greatest numbers. Venot also mentions the poor food and hard work which the penitents were given. He does not appreciate the religious reasons which made this regime appropriate in the nuns' eyes, and one wonders if many of the penitents did either. However charitable the religious sisters' intentions were, the physical conditions of life in the Miséricorde must have made accepting its discipline all the harder to girls who still possessed some physical vigour and hope.

It seems that in Bordeaux the authorities knew that some women used the Miséricorde as a half-way house between the dispensary and the cabaret. How harmful this reputation must have been for those who left the refuge and sincerely tried to start afresh, or for girls put in by sponsors because they needed moral protection! It is possible that the unworldly sisters did not know that their work was seen in this cynical light. In a sense one could say that a stay in the Miséricorde, or any other refuge, must have been almost as great a mark of shame as that of official registration as a prostitute, and that therefore the families which made use of those establishments may have hoped that once inside the "difficult" girl would become converted and never re-emerge to embarrass them.

The final exit

It seems obvious from the entry headings that the event of a penitent's death within the house had become formalised by the time that Register II was begun.

²⁸ Dr. J. Venot, writing in the *Précis Statistique, Hygiénique et Administratif de l'Etat de la Prostitution dans les principales villes de l'Europe* on p. 409 of *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, ed. of 1857. Unfortunately the municipal archives of Bordeaux do not contain any information on Dr. Venot.

Previously included under the "exit" column, it was later given a space of its own with room for a description of the girl's moral tendencies "in that last hour", which would help her spiritual mothers to foresee her fate in eternity. In Register II Laure de Labordère's careful hand replaced the simple phrases of Register I with what eventually became the standard formula: "She died in a very edifying manner, after having received all the sacraments of Holy Church."

Before the last sacraments could be administered the recipient must have been in receipt of the first two, baptism and confirmation; that is why attention was given in Register II to the dates on which they had been administered to the entrant. The lack of them was always made up within the house. When illness appeared to be terminal, the dying girl, even if a child, was helped to make a general confession for which she received absolution. Being then in a state of grace she was able to receive the Holy Eucharist and afterwards, if time seemed short, extreme unction. Thus provided she was sure to be received by God, even if her soul because of the weight of past sins were detained in purgatory for a time.

In some cases death was so sudden that only a general absolution could be given. It was here that the "final dispositions" were so important.

Michael...aged 25...died 16th August 1831...Almost instantly. She had only time, during the brief space of her illness, to make a general confession. She received absolution. We hope that her good dispositions and her desire have substituted for the Holy Eucharist, which she was not able to receive. But she had made her jubilee one month earlier [fulfilled conditions which brought a plenary indulgence] and her good conduct makes us hope that her death was not unprepared for.

Sometimes the death formula was shortened to: "Died in a very edifying manner". In other cases it was extended to include an account of the final illness. Very often it ran: "She died...after having edified her companions by her patience during her long illness" or "cruel suffering". "Edifying" appears to have been the key word, for it implied an exemplary response to the final experience.

In a few exceptional cases the rigidity of the description gave way to an expression of feeling:

Annette...here *Evangile*... Entered aged about six years...illegitimate...already baptised...She died, the 22nd April 1830, with such feelings of faith and love of God as one rarely sees, even in the most instructed and pious persons; desiring to die so as to have the happiness of enjoying God. She was not yet ten years old.

Further evidence of the weight attached to necrology is the fact that in both registers the death entries were the most detailed and carefully filled in of all. Details concerning parents are sometimes neglected or break off in the middle; a *sortie* or a *placée* might be left undated, and the type of employment found for the girl is never worth a mention, but it is very rare to find a death carelessly filled in. Only two other kinds of exit drew a detailed description. One was the exit and following re-entry of a girl "who did not deserve to be in this house" and who left at first to care for her sick mother and then afterwards to enter a convent of the Ursulines. She returned to the Miséricorde "because she had no vocation". This girl was one of the two who had had a noble patron and who had been placed in the refuge in childhood "only until a situation is found for her". It appears that no situation had been found, and so the girl, not allowed by the constitution to become a full sister of the Miséricorde, had tried to fit into the life of another order which did not exist so much on the fringes of society, but unsuccessfully.

The other form of *sortie* which drew more than the usual one word plus date was the rare case of "exit to marry". Only three girls had this happiness, of whom one, aged between 20 and 25, was sponsored by her own fiancé, who left her with the nuns for a couple of months before the wedding, perhaps as a form of moral disinfectant. One of the other brides was sponsored by her brother and the third by a godmother. All three girls earned very favourable comments on their behaviour; they had made friends with everyone and each "merited to be regretted by her companions."

An analysis of the whole 40-year period covered by the Bordeaux registers shows that the refuge could hope to retain and stabilise roughly one in three of all its penitents. The figure is lower only in the case of the 20 to 25 year-olds, where youth coupled with

experience gave a better chance of surviving outside the house. The much higher figure of a 61% retention rate for the 25 to 30 year-olds may show how those few extra years spent in marginal living chastened some women, leaving them far less confident of their future. It is also likely that the success rate from the point of view of the refuge may well have been higher than it looks, because many of those who died there within the first five years of residence might have been willing to stay much longer if they had survived.

It is interesting that what might be called the increased emphasis on religion shown in Register II took place over a period where fewer women were found places or returned to their relatives. It suggests that those in charge were becoming more suspicious of the power of the world outside over the penitents. This is borne out by a letter from the ecclesiastical superior, Father J-G. Chaminade, written to Thérèse Rondeau in March, 1841, in which he warns her against optimism with regard to the spiritual health of her girls:

...in the early days of their entry into the Miséricorde, doubtless they go to confession and give signs of conversion. They can fatally lead astray on this point the facile indulgence of a confessor, but in fact they are not in the least converted. Besides the affection which they still retain for sin, of which they give a thousand and one signs, often without being aware of it, they have become through the habit of vice, of which they have made frightful traffic, all flesh; and they are in general blind to what is sinful in this matter, as in any other. It is only slowly, by force of going to confession, receiving instruction, prayers and good example that their eyes are opened...²⁹

The lasting influence of teaching such as this may be seen in several entries concerning a girl or woman who had made an independent exit and then some years later " returned to us...in order to be sure of her salvation."

The Prostitution Dossier

The details found in the Bordeaux registers tell nothing of the lives of those who dared to leave its shelter for good. However there is a document kept in the

²⁹ From typed copy of a letter from Chaminade to Rondeau, 17 March, 1841, archives of the Miséricorde de Laval.

Bibliothèque Marguërite Durand in Paris which throws some light on the dim picture of the penitents which has been obtained so far. It consists of the carbon copy of a typed list of 81 brief interviews conducted from 1906 to 1909 between an anonymous female, who may have been on the staff of a hospital, and various women of whom two were dying and the rest suffering from some kind of injury or sickness. All were prostitutes, mostly clandestine as far as it is possible to judge. The staff of the Marguërite Durand Library could not give any help regarding the provenance of the document, which forms part of a dossier labelled *Prostitution 1909-1906*. It is possible that the reports were made by a colleague of Ghénia Avril de Sainte Croix who opened a shelter for prostitute women in 1900, and that a copy was sent to Marguërite Durand, a prominent feminist, for her information. Whatever the background, the reports are a unique source of personal detail regarding women who could have been accepted as penitents in a nineteenth century refuge, if they had applied. They confirm the indication found in the Bordeaux registers that a "wayward" girl was usually one from a broken family, for out of the 81 questioned two were widows, 25 were orphans and 14 had only one parent living, usually the mother. One was a girl who claimed to be the rejected daughter of a priest and his housekeeper. The proportion from disadvantaged backgrounds was probably higher than it seems, for some interviews omit family details. Eight girls had been put "in correction" "at a Bon Pasteur", the name being used indiscriminately. The most interesting feature of the interviews is that they show that 59 women had been brought up by nuns of various orders, mostly from early childhood to 18 years. Fifty-eight of the total had found work either as a domestic servant, farm hand, flower maker or seamstress after leaving home or institution. Only two appear to have been skilled workers. Twenty-three had gone straight into prostitution without seeking other employment. All of the 58 who found respectable employment claimed that they had been either seduced or raped by their respective masters or members of his family, which dismissed the girl as soon as unmistakable signs of pregnancy appeared, usually without giving wages due or a reference. In almost every case of pregnancy the mother was unable to pay the wet nurse's fee and had to give her child to the Assistance

Publique. In some cases the depression caused by losing the child led to a "descent into the street" or alcoholism. In the case of those few who were found employment by the nuns who had had charge of them, most describe the situation as one of overwork, poor food and half normal wages.³⁰ If the nuns had found a family willing to employ the girl, this circumstance had not protected her from sexual advances from males of the household. Already taught to be passively obedient, and to consider themselves inferior to virtuous women, it is no wonder that almost all of them yielded to seduction or endured rape during their employment.

All but a few of these women interviewed claimed that they had entered prostitution against their will in order to survive, yet none of them appear to have tried to gain a place in a refuge despite their poverty and friendlessness. Some explanation may be found in the following summary of the accounts given by the eight who were put into "a Bon Pasteur" by a family member during childhood.

N. 16 When her time was up she was given a railway ticket and a packed lunch and sent away. She chose to be a clandestine prostitute immediately. Her case history includes her "seduction" at ten years old.

No.60 Similar history.

No.24 She was already running wild at 13, when her parents put her inside. She chose to be a prostitute when her time was up. She married her pimp, who was in prison for theft and attempted murder at the time of the interview.³¹

Nos. 48 and 49. Georgina V and Louise M. Louise, the eldest of 8 children, played truant from school and was raped by a mason "on the fortifications" at 12 years. Her parents went to tell the priest about it. He found a lady willing to pay the 200fr required for putting the child into "the Bon Pasteur de N, section corrigées". She left at 22, "her heart full of rage" and set up house with Georgina, a fellow detainee. Had worked as clandestine prostitute for several years.

No.50 Put in correction "with the nuns" by her widowed father, where she stayed until 17. Dismissed for disobedience and laziness. Became a prostitute by choice.

³⁰ The same exploitation was noted by Frances Finnegan with regard to places found for girls from the York Refuge. See *Poverty and Prostitution; a study of Victorian prostitutes in York*, Cambridge University Press, London 1979, p.168.

³¹ This girl exemplifies the nightmares that the father of Mélanie Fleury may have had while his daughter was running wild. (See p.13 of this chapter)

No. 54 Placed in correction at a Bon Pasteur by her grandmother from 14 to 21. She left without a sou and as soon as she reached Paris found some former old girls of the refuge who helped her become a "*clandestine*."

These brief summaries indicate that the girls had not left with good memories of their time spent "in correction" or as a preservative; they had not found their mistresses to be full of sweetness and condescension.

Forty-five children were produced by the 81 women interviewed, of whom 15 died at birth or in infancy, 16 were given up to the Assistance Publique and 14 were being supported by their mothers at the time of the interview. Only one woman admitted to having had an abortion.

Although the brief records concentrate on the sexual history of the women, they do record several comments regarding the women's contact with nuns. None is favourable, although it is possible that the interviewer suppressed any that were, considering the strength of anti-clericalism among liberal circles in France during the early years of the twentieth century. The two most common complaints were that the sewing taught in the convents was not varied enough to be useful for earning a living outside, and that on leaving the house the girl was given neither money (except train fare) nor extra clothing. No after-care appears to have been offered.

These case histories act as a counterbalance to the image of the docile, pious penitent given in the hagiographies of the foundresses, because while none of the girls in the Prostitution Dossier appears to have spent voluntary time in a refuge, the majority (59) had experience of life in a convent of some kind. That they did not turn to the nuns for help in the crisis of their lives, when prostitution seemed the only way to go, is evidence of how hard they had found convent life. (Alternatively, and certainly from the point of view of the average Catholic of the time, it may show how hopelessly depraved the girls already were before entry.) This argument does not mean that the convents were to blame for the girls' failure to stay out of prostitution. Almost all female orphans or children in need in France were looked after by nuns with the state's permission; out of that number a percentage would take up prostitution in later life because of generally

poor social conditions for which the convents were not responsible, yet their general habit of allowing a girl to leave without money or a safe address to go to was extremely disadvantageous to her. The Bon Pasteur d'Angers was accused of this seemingly heartless practice later in the century, along with other religious orders. The excuse given was always the lack of money, yet if a house could found daughter convents, why could it not found half-way houses? As it was, there seemed to be a callous disregard for the friendless girl's future once she had left the convent, as if, because there was nothing outside but the kingdom of the devil, it did not matter how soon she entered it.

Obviously the sisters and girls in a refuge often lived in merely apparent unity, divided in fact by grave difficulties of communication which worked against the establishment of trust or mutual respect. St Mary Euphrasia warned her novices

"to guard against their deceits, to fear them as you would the snares of the serpent. Remember that whilst we are studying these poor children in order to understand them, they are cunningly, I would almost say maliciously, studying us...they watch you continually."³²

In March 1819 Thérèse Rondeau, writing to her mentor, the Bonne Mère de Lamourous, on the subject of the first penitents who entered her recent foundation showed what a mixed bag of personalities the sisters had to deal with. It is obvious that many of these eighteen penitents found it hard to adapt to refuge life from the start, and were making difficulties for others; however the picture is not all black. The foundress would try to retain the gentle, obedient women and the easily trained child. [The names used are the house names.]

The first, *Faith*, aged 17, of a light and inconstant character. Second: *Hope*, aged 30. She is very proud. That is her main defect. One can trust her, though. 3rd *Charity*, aged 29, very inconstant and easily influenced, but full of goodwill. 4th, *Theology*, aged 16, full of malice, of dodges, without frankness, always murmuring, in fact used to playing all sorts of parts. For several days she has asked to leave and I see that I am going to be obliged to let her go. 5th, *Contrition*, aged 30, very deceitful. On seeing her, you would think that she was worth something, but at bottom she is nothing but a hypocrite. Also she has a nervous illness. She falls down three or four

³² *Conferences and Instructions, etc.*, p.27.

times a day..6th, *Madeleine*, aged 21, gentle, full of goodwill. She has so far never caused me the slightest pain. 7th, *Catherine*, aged 30, very imperious, wanting to do just as she likes and to lord it over the others. 8th, *Humility*, aged 28, bad character, bad tempered and devious. 9th, *Nativity*, aged 20, superficial;, affects timidity, little intelligence, very talkative. 10th, aged 13, *Conception*, a bit wanting but no essential faults. At that age it is very easy to train a child as one wishes. 11th, *Annonciade*, aged 18, complainer, bad-tempered, argumentative, vindictive. Joined to this, she also has a terrible nervous illness...12th, *Olympia*, aged 32. Full of faults...great hypocrisy, even in the confessional. 14th, *Epiphany*, aged 25, dissipated, light, hardhearted, argumentative, deceiving, and gives bad advice to others. 15, *Valentine*, aged 23, obstinate, hard to convince, keeping always in her heart a criminal attachment³³..She is pregnant..I am going to try...to place her. 16th, *Bibianne*, aged 22, sweet in appearance, but very deceitful. I believe it was through passion that she go up one night to help someone else, she said. 17th, *Jenny*, aged 33, very gentle, a peacemaker. She appears to have received some education. I think that in a little while she will make a good surveillante. She is also intelligent. 18th, *Christine*, aged 40, fairly obedient..I made difficulties about receiving her because of her age.

Lamourous responded with various counsels, but in the case of *Bibianne* she commanded "Out!..The most horrible crime always follows particular friendships among these poor girls." By this she meant lesbianism, of which her house had had much "sad experience". The epileptic was also to be dismissed.

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The evidence presented in this chapter can be used to sketch the figure of the penitent or preservative within the overall picture of the refuge. As Henri Joly found just after the turn of the century with regard to the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, the institution was a place which would take the difficult and the unpleasant,³⁴ the sexually exploited child, unfit for inclusion among innocent orphans cared for by other houses, the homeless foundling, expelled from public care on her majority, who had been found earning her keep on the streets and girls whose relations feared to be exposed to public contempt on their account. He might have added that it also took others who had confessed to a

³³ To the man she loved.

³⁴ H. Joly, on p.5 of *L'Affaire du Bon Pasteur de Nancy: un épisode de la lutte religieuse*, states that it is not possible to study criminal and penitent populations of prisons, institutions, etc., without knowing that the inmates have certain faults: sensuality, laziness, effrontery, lying and blackmail.

priest or a nun how tired they were of their life of "disorder", and who therefore had been recommended to the mother superior of a Bon Pasteur or a Miséricorde, and girls released from prison where they had been placed as delinquent minors to protect them from a corrupt environment, and who therefore were unlikely ever to find honest employment. In the capital some of the girls who became penitents were the victims of a romantic tradition immortalised in Puccini's *La Bohème*: "the deceived and abandoned of the latin quarter", *grisettes* who had spent a few years as the lovers of poor students, future lawyers, doctors, etc., from whom they had disdained to ask support. A few found their way to the Refuge Sainte Anne outside Paris, "sometimes broken-hearted, sometimes bruised physically, always bitter and overwhelmed." It was not unknown for the young men who were on the way up socially, and who therefore needed to get rid of their girls, to bring them themselves to the house, saying "Let her be rehabilitated through two years of penitence with you, my Sisters, and then make her a nun...I don't want to see her belong to anyone else."³⁵

With regard to what the general public thought of the inmates of a refuge, Bishop Rumeau's low opinion of the majority of the Bon Pasteur's boarders, quoted at the head of the chapter, was probably shared by most people if they thought of the girls at all. It was because of this that Father J.-B. Terrien, writing of the girls in the Laval refuge, was eager to affirm their purity of mind and heart after they had been converted.

People imagine that (the refuges) are like prisons, I would even say, a sort of hell. On one side, undisciplined girls, coarse, full of regrets or unhealthy desires, detesting their solitude and ready to run away as soon as they can manage it...On the other, the nuns, obliged to have a rod in their hands, a threat on their lips, ruling by fear, not loved, or only loved a little, when they are not cordially detested. One imagines, in consequence, that their calling is terrible....What things one must hear and see in such a place!³⁶

Such opinions are the fruit of ignorance, wrote Terrien, or are based on what those girls say who have not been able to put up with the discipline. Nevertheless he believed that it was not in the best interests of even the most devout of the penitents to allow them to

³⁵ Mortier, *Bonne Mère*, quoting from a publicity leaflet of the 19th century, p.239.

³⁶ Terrien, *Notice sur la Congrégation*, etc., p.36.

return to the world. Experience had shown that they fell again and that their last state was worse than the first.

Today there is more understanding of what the nineteenth century called weakness or perversity, especially with regard to the young. It seems only natural to us that the subject population of any refuge should have contained many whose wretched lives had brought out the worst in them, and whose efforts to adapt were so painful that they fell back into hypocrisy in order to be allowed to remain. The nuns were on the lookout for such tares among the good grain; they would have been weeded out after a while. If they were not they must have turned into very unpleasant *surveillantes* or *anciennes* (old girls), of the kind who flatter those above while bullying their inferiors. It seems clear that the sisters were undertaking an enormous task in attempting to modify, through the enforcement of religious disciplines, the emotional and physical life of girls who had received very little love or instruction from anyone before they came to the refuge. Marie-Françoise Lévy's book about the education of middle-class Frenchwomen in the nineteenth century shows, in contrast, how much maternal care and close attention was considered necessary in order that even a privileged child might grow up to be both agreeable company and a sincere Christian. It was unlikely that any inmate of a refuge received such a gentle and tactful "awakening to religion" as Lévy describes.³⁷ Relying on the theory that divine grace would supply all the provision that they were unable to make, the sisters imposed a severe discipline, the result of a very restricted world view, so that even their successes were obtained at the cost of the subject's adult development. The fact still remains that no-one else in France wanted anything to do with the kind of girls that they took in until the 1880's, when the state attempted to re-educate a limited number of young female offenders in its own lay institutions. Well into the present century it was still allowing the convents to handle a great many delinquent and morally neglected children and minors. Such unfortunates would have benefitted more by being taken in by loving families rather than institutions, religious or secular, but where were

³⁷ M.F. Lévy, *De Mères en Filles: l'éducation des françaises 1850/1880*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1984, Ch.II, "L'éveil religieux".

those that would accept them, then or today, in France or anywhere else, despite the re-evaluation of sexuality which has occurred since the second World War? In the nineteenth century there was no question of doing so, and as the next chapter will show, the convent refuges were allowed to carry on, *faute de mieux*, because society was not equipped to deal with its responsibilities.

CHAPTER VIII - Money and Work

The previous chapters have shown that in France the convent refuges appeared to be anachronisms, places whose inner life accorded with the seventeenth rather than the nineteenth century. But in their method of raising income these establishments behaved in accordance with the contemporary materialistic value system, for it is possible to prove that some of them used female labour in a manner similar to that of commercial enterprises.

The traditionally feminine skills of laundrywork, sewing, embroidery, flower making and lace making were particularly favoured as employment for the inmates. Doubtless the various houses took advantage of whatever opportunities were available to raise income; for example Mlle de Lamourous ventured into cigar manufacture; Thérèse Rondeau's penitents wove calico and bottled water from a mineral spring which rose inside the convent grounds. In many cases, such as that of the Bon Pasteur of the rue d'Enfert-Rochereau and the houses of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, the nuns contracted directly with big city shops or wholesalers in the provinces, particularly for the supply of men's shirts of various qualities.

Not only did a house need customers, it also needed a trained personnel. Both Rondeau and Lamourous found that many of their penitents were slow to earn income because they had never been taught the traditional feminine skills. Even a fairly large group of girls of this type were not able to earn much, and it is obvious from the correspondence between the two Miséricordes of Bordeaux and Laval that in the early years the inmates of these houses lived in genuine poverty, which shortened the lives of those who were already sick or overworked.

Do not be surprised at how little you earn; for several years our girls, numbering fifty, were not able to earn more than 1200fr annually; it was only by training them little by little in all kinds of work, and in constantly finding the more profitable kinds that they were able to earn more. For years we did not buy cloth; we used to beg for worn out shifts, sheets, dresses, etc...we patched the patches...in every least thing we were poor to the last degree....Even now there are many who have not the right costume,...who wear all sorts of odds and ends...they put up with it because they are convinced that I cannot give them anything better than...the livery of good order and holy poverty.¹

¹ Letter from Lamourous to Rondeau, 1 March 1819 Verrier, *Positio*, p.441.

This was written by Lamourous, who was a popular figure, well regarded in her native city, and, one would have thought, liable to receive alms and commissions from the faithful. The Bon Pasteur d'Angers, too, though backed by the Society of Jesus, constantly made foundations which were doomed to suffer hardship in the early years. Le Segretain du Patis argued that the nature of refuge work discouraged outside support because it was entirely private, meaning that because the girls were disgraced, it was not usual to allow any members of the public inside the house to see them. The more conventional religious orders could display openly "an orphan to feed, a sick person to care for, a pauper to assist, an old man to shelter", illustrations of practical goals which potential benefactors could appreciate, whereas the aims of a refuge could be seen only in the light of faith.² In some instances, however, the nature of the work attracted subsidies. In *Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris* the author mentioned that the prefect of police, Angles, protected the Bon Pasteur in the rue d'Enfer by giving it the annual surplus left from the receipts of the Dispensary, which sold medicines to prostitutes. He also asked the minister of the interior to allocate it a special grant. His successors followed his example, and, when the tax on prostitutes was suppressed, but the imposition of fines was continued, it was decided that the funds so raised would be given to the Bon Paster. By 1836 the city of Paris had relieved the police of this expense by giving the house an annual grant of 4,000 fr and the Conseil des Hospices gave 1,500 fr.³

In any case things were bound to improve with time, at least financially, in the establishments under discussion. As they had a labour force which received no wages they were able to undersell women working outside the refuge, despite the cost of the board they gave to their girls, although evidence later in the chapter will show that even when their piece-work prices were higher than those of their competitors, some convents still obtained large orders from merchants in the capital. During the dead season when independent seamstresses had to live on savings or find some other income⁴, convent workshops were

² Du Patis, *Vie de la Mere Th.*, p.88.

³ Parent Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution*, Vol. II, p.362.

⁴ The Count d'Haussonville in *Misère et Remèdes* (1892) found that in Paris seamstresses in "ordinary underwear and shirts" earned 2 to 2.5 fr a day, but that if they worked for wholesalers they

still operative, allowing the institutions to offer large supplies of ready-made articles of fine or coarse qualities to wholesalers immediately on demand. Therefore even if their prices were merely similar to those of outside female workers, their ability to pile up supplies in the slack months of the year made the "off" season less of a tax on their resources than their defenders wished to believe.

The mention of "defenders" anticipates the information which will be given later in the chapter. It concerns the fact that all the refuges mentioned in this study concentrated for the most part on teaching skills which would qualify their workforce to earn none but the most meagre living out in the world. Thérèse Rondeau followed the unusual practice of sending out trusted girls to act as sick-nurses for the townspeople of Laval, but this venture was unfortunately nipped in the bud by the arrival of the Little Sisters of the Poor, a newly founded nursing order which specialised in home care.

Work was not the only source of income, although it was the largest and the most reliable. All the foundations were made in the firm hope that divine providence would come to their aid in the difficult early years, and in the published accounts of all of them (except in the case of the Bon Pasteur of the rue d'Enfert-Rochereau) several examples are quoted of sums of money or gifts of food or lodging coming just in the nick of time, after fervent prayer. In some cases the miraculous is invoked to explain why a certain amount of provision lasted days or weeks longer than anyone estimated that it could. Events like these can be neither proved nor disproved; their nature takes them out of the kingdom of this world and thus out of the field of this study. What is certain is that they gave immense encouragement to the foundresses and their co-workers both at the time and for years afterwards, for they were accepted as signs of divine approval of the work.

Another source of revenue was derived from the occasional appearance of a wealthy benefactor whose generosity was above the average. The Count de Neuville is a prime example of this, a man who, considering that his gifts furthered the work of God, beggared himself and angered his heirs by years of sacrificial giving to the foundations of St Marie

only earned 1.25 fr a day. Skilled embroideresses could earn up to 5 fr a day but their "dead" season lasted eight months.

Euphrasie.

Her generalate also received vocations from several older women, some of them widows, who had large inheritances or annuities which they brought with them into the funds of the house. In one case land was donated by a widow who became a novice. It seems to have been common practice for those who brought an important sum of money with them to be appointed to some post of honour or responsibility when their novitiate was over, although only the accounts of the Bon Pasteur generalate furnish evidence of this.⁵

On the whole the biographers avoid suggesting that the nuns had wealth in their own right, preferring to write of miracles or of the generosity of patrons, both great and small. None refer to the fact that on taking the veil a novice or her family was expected to provide the congregation with a dowry in money or property as a recompense for the expense of her keep. The superior general, or the bishop of the diocese could excuse her from this at discretion. The dowry could not be used as income by the congregation, being inalienable during the life of the nun. On her decease, if she were still a novice, it had to be returned to her heirs, without interest, even if she had professed her vows on her deathbed. After the woman or girl had made a profession at the end of her novitiate, even if the vows were not final, the congregation or its superior became her heir and any money she had given had to be invested in safe securities. This benefit explains the eagerness of congregations or other charities to be granted official recognition, whereby they received legal personality and could inherit. Without that status the dying professed nun could only leave her money to an individual, such as the mother superior, whose own natural heirs might claim property which had been left to her, even if it meant taking the congregation to court.

In the case of exit, dismissal or transfer from one congregation to another, the capital represented by the dowry had to be returned to the woman in question. An example of this is furnished by the experience of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers with a certain Madame Vincent who had donated land on entering the order. She was made superior of the

⁵ See the case of Mme Vincent on the next page. Also

agricultural colony of Nazareth (in Angers) which had been created in 1855 out of the two farms which she had given. Her subsequent decision to return to private life obliged the order to borrow in order to repay her the value of her land, and to do this it had to take on a debt which was not discharged until 1887.

Another common practice of convents which was followed by the refuges was that of taking in paying female boarders, usually old and single. The Miséricorde de Laval did this from the beginning. Mother Pelletier used to offer to take such women as boarders for life, in return for a lump sum of four, five or six thousand francs.⁶ She also encouraged the formation of groups of laywomen in each of the towns containing one of her houses; these ladies promised to give five francs a year each for ten years to her work.

All the congregations studied gained the interest of some members of the clergy: bishops, priests or brothers of some order. These men, besides giving on their own account, encouraged generosity among the faithful. Municipalities were also asked for subsidies, particularly the City of Paris, which gave regular annual amounts to many charities.

Those houses which accepted minors put in by the state's correctional services or by the child's own family naturally expected either a regular contribution to their upkeep or a lump sum at the beginning of the girl's stay. Enquiries by Henri Joly and Auguste Rivet at the turn of the century discovered that at that time the state usually paid about 60 centimes a day for its boarders. In the case of private families they paid what they could, a lump sum of two hundred francs being the amount mentioned regarding the refuge St Michel in Paris, which was run by the Bon Pasteur d'Angers. The registers of Bordeaux do not mention any sum of money, and the Miséricorde de Laval was known generally as a house which would take girls in for nothing.⁷ The constitutions of the refuges studied do not mention money at all.

Despite providential help, donations and charges it still appears to have been certain that a refuge was mainly sustained by the work of its penitents and preservatives, even

⁶ *Spirit and Charism*, p.98.

⁷ See the report of correspondence regarding Mélanie Fleury on p 18 of Ch.IX.

children as young as seven being mentioned as performing certain tasks in some cases. An undated document in the archives of the original Bon Pasteur in what is now the rue Denfert-Rochereau confirms this, together with the commonly held sentiment that it was to idleness that most of the penitents owed their fall from grace:

One of the principal causes of the straying of young girls of the poor classes being idleness, distaste for work and the poverty which results thereby, the Bon Pasteur is meant to be and has always been since its foundation, a MODEL WORKSHOP as well as a house of moral and religious education. Fine needlework is taught there. The profit from this work forms the most considerable part of the income of the house, which for that end is in relation with the first establishments for the sale of fine linen in Paris.⁸

There was certainly money to be made from this, although in the case of the Bon Pasteur in the rue d'Enfer the Ladies Patronesses, who supervised the accounts, ensured that a quarter of each penitent's earnings (*le pécule*⁹) should be set aside for her benefit when or if she left the refuge. The houses run by Lamourous, Rondeau and Chupin may have done this, but no mention is made of it in the documents available for this study. The Bon Pasteur generalate always insisted that it was too poor to be able to give departing penitents any money.¹⁰ The question of its ability to do so was debated bitterly in France at the end of the last century and the beginning of our own. Years before this, in her work on female poverty in France, Julie Daubié suggested that, far from being ventures of sacrificial charity, some convents were founded to take advantage of cheap female labour:

...our society is so vicious, the conditions of apprenticeship are so disadvantageous for a young girl, that our industrial cloisters grow rich by making contracts with female apprentices compelled to give the use of their time in exchange for food.

These industrial convents would alone suffice to prove the difficult, even impossible condition of the daughters of the people; they offer poor food in return for very hard work; nevertheless girls flock to them to the point where, for the last fifteen years, the state annually authorises from 80 to 100 female congregations.¹¹

⁸ *Statuts et Règlement de l'Œuvre du Bon Pasteur, rue d'Enfer 71, Article XIII.* Arch.B.P. pièce 51.

⁹ This was the recognised name for a small amount of money supposed to be given to children leaving charitable organisations in which they had worked for years, to help them begin their new careers.

¹⁰ Auguste Rivet and Henri Joly, in two works mentioned later in the chapter, go to some trouble to prove the generalate's incapacity in this matter.

¹¹ J.V. Daubié, *La femme pauvre*; Gillaumin et Cie, Paris, 1866, p.2. The author did not name any particular congregation.

The question is a delicate one: how much work should a charitable foundation require from its subjects and when does an insistence on the value of regular occupation degenerate into exploitation of a virtually captive labour force? The answer in late nineteenth-century France was not so much based on fact as on whether one belonged to the Church party or voted republican, for very little was known publicly concerning a convent's finances and much was conjectured. With regard to the convent-refuges, although a minor form of charity compared with the great teaching or hospital orders, one congregation furnished two examples of exploitation which support Julie Daubié's opinion that the convent was as ready to exploit the female poor as any other employer. The first of these came to public notice only briefly; the second furnished the Left with a lot of sticky mud to sling.

The scandal of Cholet¹²

The affair began on 14 June 1887 with a letter from the sub-prefect of Cholet to his departmental head at Angers:

Sir,

I believe it my duty to call your attention to the establishment of the Bon Pasteur at Cholet. Approved by a decree of 21 May 1865 as a house of refuge, this establishment is a branch of the Bon Pasteur of Angers. At first very small, it...has today a population of about 350 children directed by a personnel of 70 nuns or novices.

Recruitment takes place among the poorer class and among female orphans and indigent girls. Some are admitted for nothing¹³ and others pay a small sum. The latter appear to be received only after...a contract of apprenticeship signed before a notary, which provides for a penalty of 200frs in the case of the family reclaiming the child before the age of 21 years.

What is the aim of this establishment? Is it conformable to its origins? Is it a refuge, a shelter which offers protection to young females, a school which educates and also gives moral teaching? In a word, is it a benevolent establishment designed to remove young girls from poor surroundings or is it really one created from motives of profit? I am looking into this question. The Bon Pasteur has up to now been excused all surveillance. Nevertheless we know that the house makes women's clothing and

¹² All the documents cited in the account of this case are to be found in the departmental archives of Maine et Loire, Série V8, 16 and 53.

¹³ This means that the girls were those for whose care the convent had been originally founded, namely sexually disgraced females.

offers serious competition to commercial houses who cannot operate so cheaply because of the high price of wages. A nun representing the house is apparently sent frequently to Paris to carry on negotiations with important merchants of the capital and thus augment the size of a business which is already too considerable for the little boarders, from whom extra work is demanded to the limit of what they can give. Industrial work in these conditions is not an accessory to education, but forms its principal part and one may say that professional training is not given to these children with a view to procuring them skills which will permit them to fight the battle of life and to gain an honourable existence. Also there is nothing for us to congratulate ourselves about regarding the results obtained, for, if I may believe the information supplied to me by the inspector of police, most of the girls who leave the establishment on their majority turn out badly and usually give themselves up to prostitution.

The sub-prefect wished the refuge to fall henceforward within the jurisdiction of the local factory inspector concerned with child labour (*Service des enfants dans les manufactures*). He had also been informed that the education given the children was inadequate, and with regard to this enclosed a copy of the following letter from the Mother Superior of the house at Cholet to the chief inspector of police in his sub-district:

Cholet 8 June 1887.

Sir,

In presenting you with my very deep respects I have the honour to request your attention to my letter...concerning our children below the age of 13 years, of whom we have about thirty in all. Of course we will conform to the regulations, sir, without the slightest difficulty! Let me profit from this occasion to express to you my feeling of gratitude in the name of our whole community for your benevolence in regard to our dear children...I would be happy to talk to you, sir, about a matter of such importance and I dare to request the honour of a visit, for which I thank you in anticipation.

The signatory was Sister Marie de Ste Christine, the religious name of Josephine Luckrath, a Prussian national, superior of the refuge. The sub-prefect added that this conciliatory letter had enclosed a banknote for fifty francs. When questioned about this by the inspector Mother Ste Christine merely replied that it was the usual practice of the house and that he could very well accept a little present, for no-one would know. She had misjudged her man; he began proceedings against her for "attempted corruption of a French official by a superior belonging to a foreign nationality".

Encouraged to pursue his enquiries by the prefect of Maine et Loire, the sub-prefect

ordered the police to investigate a report in *Le Ralliement*, a republican newspaper of Angers, in which it was alleged that a former inmate of the house at Cholet had been brutally punished by stabs with scissors during her apprenticeship there. The girl in question, Victoire Samson, aged 13, had been removed from the convent because of an outbreak of typhoid. She denied that she had been stabbed by scissors but made the following declaration which was forwarded to the prefect on 30 June 1887. It furnishes the only signed and witnessed statement yet published by an inmate whose last memory of a refuge was only two weeks old.

I have been at the Bon Pasteur for three years and my parents took me out only a fortnight ago. During that time I only had one hour of school a day and the rest of my day was spent making men's shirts.¹⁴ If we did not make three and a half shirts a day they punished us, sometimes by making us pass the night on a straw mattress, sometimes by giving us maize broth (which we called pig-swill). For our daily work we were under the surveillance of the big girls who, if we did anything wrong, used to hit us even in the presence of the sisters. They used to prick us with pins or needles on the arm or the hands. As for the nuns, yes they did give us a little slap now and then, but no more. One day before I left, in the absence of the sisters, the girl Guerze hit me on the left arm with a stick and it hurt me very much and she did it because she did not like me. I have never been struck with scissors in the hand or elsewhere; it was Alice Brisset who was, some time ago, by Léontine Lucas, after a quarrel that they had.

In the morning we got up at half past four. After prayers we began work until it was time for Mass. After Mass we had breakfast and we began work again until midday...We began work again which did not finish until seven in the evening for supper and after supper we said prayers and then went to bed.

When you sleep on a mattress after doing something wrong you do not have sheets. When the big girls are punished they go in the dungeon until bedtime. These are the punishments that are usually given.

The girl's mother also made the following declaration which was written at the end of the page containing that of her daughter. Both statements were witnessed.

A fortnight ago, having learned that an epidemic reigned at the Bon Pasteur I took back my daughter who had been there three years. *Madame la Supérieure* made a few difficulties but she consented nonetheless. While she was in the house she told us that she was beaten, that they pricked her with needles and kicked her with their clogs. She did not tell us if it was the nuns who illtreated her or the other big girls

¹⁴ By "making" she means assembling pre-cut and sewn pieces.

who make them work. Indeed I noticed that she had pinpricks on her arms and hands.

She also told me that she was badly fed, that she had only maize broth in the mornings and a salad of potatoes at night and sometimes tripe. I never heard anything about scissor-stabs.

The sub-prefect was moved by the testimony of Victoire Samson and was in complete agreement with the inspector of police who had written out a charge against the Mother Superior of Cholet and sent it to the Public Prosecutor. He had done this on the 4th July, 1887, after visiting the refuge in the company of Divisional Inspector Giroux, of the Ministry of Commerce, Department of Factory Labour by Children and Female Minors, for the district including Maine et Loire. The substance of the report sent by Giroux on 5th July to the Minister of Commerce was that he had found two separate sections within the refuge inhabited solely by children and female minors, divided into penitents and preservates. Of the latter he found a total of 71 children from 7 to 15 years and a total of 61 female minors from 16 to 21 years. All worked seven hours a day, he was told, except the children from 7 to 10 years, who only worked 3 hours and those from 10 to 12 years who worked five. The penitents' workshop contained 13 girls from 12 to 16 years old and 62 female minors from 16 to 21 years. These girls were apparently treated more severely than the preservates, for all, even the youngest, worked nine hours a day. The total workforce of 207 persons was occupied in making shirts, which arrived from Paris in pieces already cut and stitched. The children sewed them together and made hems and buttonholes. All the year they did the same work; they did not learn the trade as a whole. Giroux was told that the Paris warehouses paid 30 centimes for the work done on each shirt.

He also found that although primary education had been formerly given by the nuns, a few days earlier the convent had engaged a licensed schoolmistress from Cholet to conduct a daily class of three hours for 33 girls aged from 7 to 15 years, although the establishment contained over double the number in that age group. His findings were that "this establishment is an industrial establishment in the full meaning of the word. Its aim is not to give the children a professional education but to make a profit. In these conditions it falls within the jurisdiction of the law of 19 May 1874" for the regulation of child labour. As

the legal age for working in an *atelier de couture* was 12 years, nineteen children were illegally employed. Most of these children were either orphans or foundlings, therefore the case was submitted by Giroux to the Minister of Commerce for his instructions. The Minister of the Interior, on being informed of the inspector's findings, sent for a copy of the Bon Pasteur de Cholet's constitutions, for it had been granted the status "of public utility" twelve years earlier. With his consent charges were brought against the mother superior of Cholet on 16 July 1887. Josephine Luckrath was tried by the correctional tribunal of Cholet for keeping a school with untrained staff in contravention of the law of 30 October 1886, with directing a school although she was of a foreign nationality and with an attempt to corrupt a public officer. The tribunal found her guilty on all counts. It fined her 20fr for the first offence, excused her for committing the second and fined her 30fr for the attempted bribery, although the offence carried a prison sentence. It is obvious that the congregation had friends at court.

On 27 July 1887 a letter was sent from the Director of Public Assistance at Angers to the Minister of the Interior enclosing, at his request, the following contract of apprenticeship between the Community of the Bon Pasteur of Cholet and a certain Madame Arnoul, a sick woman whose husband was in prison:

10 December 1880
Contract of Apprenticeship

...before us, Alexander Casimir Loiseau *greffier* of the
Justice of the Peace of the canton of Cholet have appeared

Mme Rosalie Simon, wife of M. Jean Arnoul detained in the Central Prison of Chouars...the said lady silk winder of Cholet, at Bourgneuf, but actually sick in the hospital at Cholet of the one part and Mme Marie Ste Eulalie, superior of the community of the Bon Pasteur of Cholet, resident there...of the other part. The same...have agreed as follows.

Mme Arnoul proposes to place in the community of the Bon Pasteur of Cholet, to stay there until their majority, that is to say until the age of twenty-one full years 1. her daughter Marie-Antoinette, born...on 8 August 1867...and 2. Félicité-Constance, aged eight years...

The community of the Bon Pasteur consents to receive the female minors...and engages to feed and keep them in all things necessary and to give them instruction according to the rules established in the community and as well to teach them dressmaking (*la couture*).

It is expressly agreed that Mme Arnoul cannot under any pretext withdraw her daughters from the house of the Bon Pasteur de Cholet...before they have attained their majority...without paying the penalty of the sum of two hundred francs for each of the said female minors to the community...before the said children leave it.

It is also agreed that in the case where these female minors become the victims of certain illnesses, such as madness or epilepsy, the community...has the right to return them to their mother.

This document showed that the abuse of trust practised in the refuge was not solely the responsibility of Josephine Luckrath; it had been going on before she was appointed as mother superior. Nevertheless, acting on information received when in consultation with the Public Prosecutor of Angers, the Director of Public Assistance in Angers advised the Minister that, although the fines imposed on the Bon Pasteur were derisory, the shame of being brought to court was possibly punishment enough. He agreed with the Minister that they would be within their rights to send the mother superior of Cholet back to Prussia and even to withdraw the status of charitable establishment granted to the refuge in 1865. The house at Cholet had certainly been found to be using factory methods, but as the region was one in which "religious sympathies were still very much alive",¹⁵ the Director advised the Minister that he believed it better to give a very strong warning to the reverend mother and make sure that she heeded it.

Meanwhile the Public Prosecutor of Angers ordered Cholet police to make a second investigation into the testimony of Victoire Samson. As a result four girls from the refuge were questioned separately and all denied everything that Victoire had said. The girl's mother also withdrew her support of her daughter's testimony, saying that the girl was young for her age and not reliable. Whatever underhand arrangements may have brought this about, the sub-prefect forwarded the police report to his superior at Angers with no comment.

The correspondence for the next eighteen months is missing, but the gap is filled by three newspaper reports which prove that despite the efforts of the Public Prosecutor of Angers, the state was not prepared to let the matter rest. *Le Ralliement* (republican paper

¹⁵ Cholet had been a centre of resistance by the Chouans in the early years of the Revolution.

of Angers) of 22 March 1888 reported the judgment and sentence of Josephine Luckrath by the correctional tribunal of Cholet. Factory inspector Giroux, and police inspector Bellouet were the main witnesses. As a result Luckrath was found guilty of 34 contraventions of the law regarding the education of children and of that regarding conditions of work within a house supposed to be a benevolent institution. She was therefore fined 340fr and ordered to pay costs of 51.96fr.

In the capital *Le Petit Parisien* picked up the report and published it on 27th March 1888. Both it and *Le Ralliement* drew attention to the tribunal's findings regarding the work done by the 200 girls. Between 5 January and 4 November 1887 the Bon Pasteur de Cholet had sent to Paris 19,173 kilos of clothing, shirts or camisoles, whose average weight a piece was between 350 and 400 grammes. (Both newspapers got their sums wrong, over-estimating the number of pieces done at a total of 70,000 articles.) The tribunal estimated the net profit to the house during this period, *apart* from sales to local and regional customers, as not less than 45,000frs. The tribunal also took notice of the fact that out of 200 only 34 girls were receiving any education and that all work done was repetitious piece work. Under these truly industrial conditions it appeared unlikely to the court that any young girl leaving the Bon Pasteur at the age of 21 years could be in a position to earn her own living as a seamstress.

A fine of 340frs for making a profit of at least 45,000fr by unlawful means appears grossly inadequate, but an appeal was lodged against it in the name of the accused. Judgment was given by the Court of Angers on 11 May 1888 and published by *Le Ralliement* on the 15th. The figures for the number of articles made was given correctly this time at 54,000 pieces done in ten months for the Paris trade alone. Contrary to what was generally believed both then and since, the court found that the Bon Pasteur had been getting top prices for the children's work, namely 0.75fr to 2.00 fr *per article* instead of the 0.30fr quoted to Inspector Giroux. (It had therefore not been undercutting private seamstresses, and yet had got the contracts. Were such advantageous rates obtained generally by Bon Pasteur convents? And why?) The court had seen the convent's account books for 1882, when profits from work had amounted to 51,300frs, being part of a total

income of 78,900fr. Money spent on the care of the workforce of nearly 300 children during that time had been used as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| Baker's goods | 24,000 |
| Butcher's meat | 7,831 |
| Sundry other food | 9,475 |

Total 41,306

being 206.53fr a year for each child, or 3.97fr per week.)

These figures show that a gross profit of 37,194fr was left, a large sum in the money of the day.

The testimony of a girl of 16 who had left the convent was read to the court. It was very similar to that given privately to the police by Victoire Samson the year before. Regarding punishments the girl testified:

When we were punished we had to wear our dresses inside out. I know that cells exist in the establishment which I have never seen, but when a girl was too recalcitrant I have several times heard the sister say "Take her to the cells" and she was led off immediately. I have also heard them speak of straightjackets.

Despite an appeal, the Court of Angers upheld the judgment of the tribunal, considering that the methods of work and the profits made by the refuge were similar to those of an enterprise run merely for commercial gain. The Bon Pasteur appealed to the Cour de Cassation to break the Court of Anger's decision but was rejected on 2 August 1888.

In response to ministerial enquiries the sub-prefect of Cholet advised his superior that the expulsion of the Prussian, Luckrath, could be done without antagonising the electorate of the canton, despite its clerical sympathies. An expulsion order was given on 9 October 1888 and complied with 15 days later.

The Minister of the Interior then considered withdrawing from the Cholet refuge the status "of public utility" which had been granted it on 22 April 1865, but as this was a serious step and might end in the closure of the house he asked for a preliminary report. On Christmas Day 1888 the factory inspector, Giroux, reported that many reforms had been made in the refuge so that it now conformed to the child labour act of 1874 and the

education act of 1886. Nevertheless the work still continued to be organised on an assembly line and the children's diet was just as poor as it had previously been.

The question that had been asked at the very beginning of the affair was still pertinent, namely, was the Cholet house a charitable workshop or a commercial one? By a ruling of the Cour de Cassation of 28 February 1881, "family workshops" were exempt from the obligations imposed by the law of 19 May 1874 regulating the hours and conditions of work for children and minors. Benevolent institutions like the Cholet refuge had been included in that exemption because "the industrial work is only used as an accessory to...the provision of professional training."¹⁶ If the Cholet refuge was organised on commercial lines it was within the law but had put itself in a position where its "public utility" status was no longer merited.

Despite the fact that the Minister of the Interior felt strongly that public trust had been betrayed in the case of Cholet, the sub-prefect wrote on 10 February 1889 in reply to the prefect's request for information that

...although the house of the Bon Pasteur is preoccupied less with the children's future than with its own prosperity, I hesitate...to propose to you that the refuge be closed. Two hundred children and female minors, most of them without families, find shelter in this establishment. If it is closed I fear that the Government will be seen as acting against the children's interests. As much as the expulsion of Mme Luckrath gave satisfaction to public opinion, an equal amount of displeasure will be felt by the misinformed if the Bon Pasteur's official status is abruptly withdrawn. As only 23 of these children belong to the Department of Maine et Loire...it would be easy to find a home for them...but the placement of nearly 200 girls...belonging to a large number of departments would present great difficulties.

A further indication of the disapproval felt by authorities in the capital was a letter of 15 June 1889 from the Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs (Cultes) to the Bishop of Angers, the well-known writer and reactionary, Mgr Freppel, announcing the government's desire to deprive the Bon Pasteur de Cholet of its legal recognition as a benevolent establishment and asking for his comments. The bishop visited the refuge on the 17th and, in the words of the right-wing paper, *L'Intérêt Public de Cholet*, "made the

¹⁶ From the *procès verbal* delivered by the factory inspector Giroux to the Public Prosecutor of Angers, 29 July 1887.

most minute enquiry into the establishment, from which it resulted, by the most complete evidence, that the house remained a charitable establishment providing incontestable services"¹⁷ and that it "shelters, feeds and instructs 300 children and orphans abandoned by the parents who ought to watch over them, and who would be destined for the most frightful poverty and too often to vice if they had not found asylum in the refuge of the Bon Pasteur."¹⁸ The implication that the girls had been abandoned by unworthy parents demonstrates another of the marks of shame which attended residence in a refuge: it proved that one must have come from a very bad home. The bishop also told the paper that the house was menaced with closure. The *Intérêt Publique* therefore demanded to know who had asked for the suppression, suggesting that the republican party was behind it. A week later it published the words of a public petition to Mgr Freppel in which His Grace was begged to safeguard an institution which had for years "carefully brought up many poor girls of this region and prepared them for an honourable life." This document, with 903 signatures, was forwarded to the Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs by the end of the month.

On 3 July 1889 the prefect wrote to the Minister of the Interior advising him that the refuge be left alone for the present and enclosing a letter from the Mayor of Cholet, soon up for re-election, who believed that his success would be gravely compromised if the withdrawal of status led to the closure of the Bon Pasteur. This man was "the only passable republican candidate" in the whole region, who had won by a very small margin last time. The Minister replied by return of post that the government's intentions had been misrepresented. No closure was envisaged and the Minister wished this made clear to the public. The directress of the refuge must nevertheless be instructed to give better food and less hours of work to her charges. The Minister also included a paragraph from a letter addressed to the Garde des Sceaux by the Bishop of Angers when forwarding the above-

¹⁷ *L'Intérêt Publique de Cholet*, 23.6.1889. Although Mgr Freppel was interested in social catholicism, he claimed that moral renovation and private initiative sufficed to provide the essential remedies for social wrongs.

¹⁸ The same, 30.6.1889. The actual number of girls and children was 207, which rather discredits the bishop's claim to have made a "minute" inquiry.

mentioned petition, in which His Grace had made himself responsible for the future good behaviour of the Bon Pasteur de Cholet with regard to its workforce. The bishop represented the nuns, not the girls they controlled, as the poor weak females who could not defend themselves:

Let us be told what possible ameliorations are desired, and the congregation of the Bon Pasteur will hasten to realise them. The role of inspectors and prefects is not to provoke the closure of charitable establishments, to the great detriment of religious peace, but to indicate useful reforms. Instead of troubling poor nuns who are incapable of defending themselves, let the officials get in touch with the bishops...and I undertake, for my part, to see that their wishes are complied with.

The prefect was informed that if, inspite of the bishop's undertaking, the state's legitimate demands were *not* complied with, the refuge would have merited loss of status and subsequent closure.

++*+*+*+*+

The fact that one house of the Good Shepherd was run like a factory does not necessarily mean that all its foundations abused their position of public trust. What is suggestive in the Cholet case is that the refuge in question was part of the order's European provincialate, whose centre was the *maison mère* itself at Angers. The physical proximity of Cholet to Angers is another factor which leads one to suppose that the direction of the mother house knew and had always known what was done in its subsidiary, particularly in view of the large amounts of revenue which the latter was earning and which would appear in the Angers accounts. Besides this, the foundress, St Marie Euphrasie, had insisted on similarity of organisation for all her houses, so as to facilitate the transfer of executive staff, yet Josephine Luckrath was left to stand trial alone, as if she, the Prussian alien, had been the innovator of the practices condemned at her trial. The state accepted this, preferring to punish her rather than to investigate the order in France as a whole. Had it done so it ran the risk of having to provide alternative care for several thousand destitute women and children instead of merely for the 207 at Cholet, with public excitement and

misrepresentation in the press correspondingly magnified. However, ten years later another accusation regarding exploitation of its workforce was levelled at a Bon Pasteur refuge; the details of the case were widely reported in the press, and this time the state insisted on closure.

The Scandal of the Bon Pasteur

At the end of the century, when France was bitterly divided over the Dreyfus affair, the press eagerly seized on evidence inadvertently provided by the Bishop of Nancy to launch a campaign which developed into "*Le scandal du Bon Pasteur*". Mgr Turinaz was the man in question, an outspoken authoritarian (later a violent anti-modernist) who was genuinely interested in female education. As a young priest he had been a protégé of Bishop Dupanloup of Orleans, whose advanced ideas about higher education for women he admired.¹⁹ Dupanloup had also been concerned with the need to raise the intellectual level of convents, a goal which had been achieved within Sophie Barat's teaching congregation of the Sacré Cœur, but which was not even aimed at by the Bon Pasteur d'Angers, one of whose daughter foundations had been in the diocese of Nancy since 1835.

The trouble began in 1893 when the bishop refused the nuns' request to replace the girls' chaplain, whom he had appointed. The former had made complaints to the mother superior regarding supplementary work imposed on the girls during the hours when they were supposed to be in chapel. After refusing to dismiss the chaplain, Mgr Turinaz went on to demand that the refuge give each girl a *pécule* on leaving. The convent claimed to be too poor to afford this, yet it was in the process of building a large and costly chapel, a vast Byzantine edifice with four wings and a cupola. The sisters claimed that the funds for this work were provided by a benefactor who wished to remain anonymous. On 19 March 1894 the bishop's commission of enquiry arrived at the refuge to examine its books. The ecclesiastical superior was at the same time deprived of his powers, presumably because he was on the wrong side. Turinaz sent reports to Rome on 31 March 1894 and 2 Feb 1895.²⁰

¹⁹ I am indebted for this information to Professor Austin Gough of the University of Adelaide.

²⁰ H. Joly, *L'affaire du Bon-Pasteur de Nancy : un épisode de la lutte religieuse*, Secretariat da la

At this the nuns appealed to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Turinaz knew he had lost when this occurred, for in the later nineteenth century the Congregation always decided against bishops in questions of diocesan authority over religious orders. A Roman prelate was dispatched to Nancy from whence he sent back a secret report to the Sacred Congregation; a decision in favour of the Bon Pasteur followed on 27 March 1896 and was communicated to the bishop shortly afterwards. Mgr Turinaz was told that by canon law the government of the finances of the Bon Pasteur at Nancy fell under the *dominative power* of the Mother General of the order, that is to say that it was part of her "domestic" affairs, and nothing to do with her local bishop. This rule applied only to female congregations of pontifical right; in the case of small local foundations the bishop's powers were both dominative and jurisdictional.²¹

None of these proceedings would have been known to the public without the intervention of a journalist, Jean de Bonnefon, who, according to Jean de Hurstel,²² had been sent to Rome by the French government to ferret out anything that might put the French congregations in a bad light. Mgr Turinaz' letters to the prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had appeared in the *Analecta Ecclesiastica* of 1895. De Bonnefon could read Latin and immediately sent the translation to Paris, where it appeared in *Le Journal* of 18 September 1899. In a letter of 31 March 1894 the bishop had written:

...the nuns, whose spending is unsupervised, have put over half a million into partly useless constructions over several years. Not only do they never give alms to the poor...but with regard to the young girls whom they receive they violate the rules of justice....At the Bon Pasteur de Nancy they receive nothing, even after having worked and earned a lot of money for the house over five, ten, twenty years. They are allowed to leave without resources, without any help in finding a place...

He also claimed that sixty girls had been allowed to leave the refuge in this state of destitution in one year. Some of these had been helped by him and they had told him that they had been approached by the agents of brothels. The letter continued:

Société d'Economie Sociale, Paris, 1901, p.8.

²¹ Francis J. Callahan, S.J., *The Centralisation of Government in Pontifical Institutes of Women with Simple Vows*, thesis given to the Gregorian Pontifical University Faculty of Law, Rome, 1948.

²² Jean Hurstel, "Monseigneur Turinaz et la Congrégation du Bon-Pasteur," *Annales de l'Est*, Nancy, Vol.316, no.3, p.215.

The nuns have no other aim but to earn money. By making it difficult for the girls to leave they manage to keep the most skilful for a long time, even for ever..Among the embroidery that they do there is bedlinen, personal underwear, blouses, etc which are of such luxury and so costly and made in such a way...that according to some very respectable women questioned by me, this bedlinen and this underwear can only be meant for the use of courtesans.

Public interest was violently aroused. The defenders of the Bon Pasteur published the fact that among the rewards given annually by the department to charitable bodies, the refuge at Nancy had received a gold medal and a special recommendation. A month later the affair was raised in the Chamber of Deputies by Fournière, socialist member for the Aisne, who asked the Minister of the Interior what measures he intended to take with regard to the crimes against nature and humanity denounced by the Bishop of Nancy.

The prefect of Meurthe et Moselle was alarmed; he ordered a report, which was submitted to him on 24 October 1899. It was favourable to the refuge, praising its meticulous cleanliness and order, concluding that "We have once again received proof that it is impossible to unite material and moral conditions better than those from which our undisciplined and light young women profit in the Bon Pasteur."²³ Dissatisfied, the prefect demanded a report from the departmental factory inspector, whose findings merely confirmed those of the previous investigation.

Grave accusations of illtreatment (which were never substantiated) having been made against several houses of the Bon Pasteur by three socialist deputies in the Chamber on 28 November 1899, the Minister of Commerce and Industry initiated a third inspection at Nancy, as a result of which the mother superior of the refuge was charged with certain minor infractions of regulations, for which she was fined 100 frs. Her appeal against this sentence in June 1900 was upheld by the Court of Nancy.

During this period Mgr Turinaz found himself attacked in the Catholic press for what appeared to many as treachery against the Church, which was then enduring the hostility of both government and working classes to an extent not previously seen in the century.²⁴ He

²³ From the report of Inspector La Flize, 24 Oct. 1899, in the archives of Meurthe et Moselle, quoted on p.217 of the article previously cited.

²⁴ Pierre Pierrard, *L'Eglise et les ouvriers en France, 1840 à 1940*, p.413.

had told Rome that he had reason to believe that all Bon Pasteur refuges were run in a similar manner, and that therefore the conditions at Nancy were common to all the houses of the generalate. He attempted to justify himself by renewed accusations, claiming that the refuge deliberately prevented the Preservates in its care from making any contact with their families. He repeated the point that the girls leaving were sent out destitute and claimed that he had evidence that the financial accounts sent to him yearly by the refuge were falsified. Surprisingly, he also drew public attention to a speech to the Chamber on 30 November 1899 by President Waldeck-Rousseau, founder of the Alliance Démocratique, and mildly anti-clerical, giving the results of a police enquiry. The report had contained evidence by former inmates of the Bon Pasteur de Nancy regarding the poor food, lack of heating and overwork suffered by them.

Over this period the press of Angers, the city of the mother house of the order, joined in the fray with vigour, *Le Petit Courrier* and *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* being against the Bon Pasteur while *Le Journal de Maine et Loire* defended it. Debates in the Chamber were published verbatim by the two republican newspapers. *Le Patriote* also published testimonies from former inmates of the houses at Angers and Cholet alleging physical illtreatment of the girls by the *surveillantes*, even in the presence of the sisters. On 1 December 1899 the *Journal du Maine et Loire* printed a long letter to the mother general, Mother Marie de Ste Marine Verger, from Mgr Joseph Rumeau, the new bishop of Angers.²⁵ To illustrate the care given to its charges he mentioned the grief of the young offenders previously placed in the Angers refuge, when the the state had removed them from congregational control by a law of 1885. Giving as the surest proof of the happiness of the inmates the fact that so many of them consented to stay for life within the house, the bishop denied that the convent owed them anything, should they decide to leave, for they had received not only board and lodging but training in sewing and household tasks, as well as the moral benefits of religious instruction. He conceded that many girls were taught to make only one thing, such as hems or buttonholes, but said that this was in accordance

²⁵ A portion of this letter forms the epigraph of Chapter VIII.

with the hard laws of commerce and was done in factories all the time. He also strove to minimise the value of the girls: "Even if one might concede that a few of your penitents...constitute a resource...their gratitude towards their benefactresses...obliges them to give back something for all that they have received." In a week or two, despite promises by the republican papers of Angers regarding exhumations to come, which would show that some penitents who had died while in the refuge had met their deaths by unnatural means, the affair blew over as far as the city itself was concerned.

What stands out from the account of the scandal at Nancy is that the official inspectors sent to verify the wellbeing of the inmates appeared to have sought evidence of hygiene and order within the refuge but had ignored Turinaz' serious charge of inhumanity, namely that girls who wished to leave were allowed to do so without money, friends or even a change of clothing. In this regard the document in the Prostitution Dossier at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand provides some evidence in support of the bishop. Interviews numbers 60 and 62 concern two girls who spent their adolescence in the Bon Pasteur de Nancy. One said that she was put outside without a sou, with no extra clothes and not knowing where to go. She was picked up by a man later the same day, who made her his mistress and then deserted her, after which she applied for registration as a prostitute. The story of no.62 is similar, except that the girl was picked up outside the very gates of the refuge. In view of this it is no wonder that the nuns tried to dissuade the girls from leaving, for by their failure to provide any sort of aftercare they greatly increased the likelihood of what they would have called the girls' moral relapse.

The scandal of the Bon Pasteur (as the newspapers called it) had scarcely begun to die down when proceedings of a lawsuit brought by a former inmate against the refuge at Nancy revived the interest. They concerned allegations brought by Marie Lecoanet, aged 45, who had spent seventeen years of her life in the house at Nancy before leaving and finding work as a seamstress in 1889. Seven years later she had put in three successive appeals without success to the *Assistance Judiciaire* in Paris, claiming that both her sight and her health had been damaged at the Bon Pasteur de Nancy because of excessive work and lack of medical care. She also claimed that she had been detained there against her

will. After the publicity given to the "scandal", Lecoanet approached the newly-formed League of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. With its help proceedings were begun in March 1900 before the correctional tribunal of Nancy, which dismissed the claim. An appeal to the Court of Nancy in 1901 resulted in a long trial and a series of enquiries which led to a new appeal in 1902 before the same court. A judgment in Lecoanet's favour was made on 28 February 1903 and she was awarded 10,000frs in damages. The League immediately published a brochure, *Le Procès du Bon Pasteur*, which contained an account of the trial and the closing speech of Lecoanet's lawyer, Prévost. A parliamentary decree was issued on 10 March 1903 closing the Bon Pasteur de Nancy.²⁶

In view of the public interest aroused by the case a defence of the Bon Pasteur generalate by Henri Joly was published in *La Réforme Sociale* of June 1901 under the title *Les Maisons du Bon-Pasteur* (The Houses of the Good Shepherd) and republished as a brochure in 1903.²⁷ A more lengthy apology followed in 1904, *La vérité sur le Bon-Pasteur*, (The truth about the Good Shepherd) by Professor Auguste Rivet, a former advocate of the Court of Appeal of Lyons. Rivet believed that the brochure published by the League of the Rights of Man had "put on collective trial the 7,000 nuns and all the good works of the generalate of Angers." He thought that a grave injustice had been done and that the scandal and its consequences had "served as a prelude to all the persecutions begun against Catholic charity in France."²⁸ Both men claimed that they had been given access to all the account books of the mother house at Angers, which contained details of the finances of all the 34 French houses and also those overseas. Joly published a table showing the staff and inmates of the Bon Pasteur refuges, worldwide:

| | |
|--|--------|
| Magdalens and penitents | 19,039 |
| Preservates: children, orphans, pupils
of industrial schools, externes educated | |

²⁶ The generalate subsequently sold 1794 sq.metres of the land involved to the City of Nancy for 262,712.95frs. Part of the buildings and the chapel still stand.

²⁷ Joly, a prolific writer, had been actively involved in works of patronage and rehabilitation for minors during the previous 15 years.

²⁸ A. Rivet, *La vérité sur le Bon-Pasteur*, Em. Vire, Lyons et Paris, 1904, p.48.

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| free or on payment, children at schools
run by native sisters | 23,506 |
| Paying boarders | 1,732 |
| Native sisters, in missions | 176 |
| Female prisoners and children "in
correction", given into charge by
various governments | 2,341 |
| Negresses, coloured children | 248 |
| Children taken into asylum | 229 |
| Deaf mutes | 144 |
| | <hr/> 47,385 |
| Sisters of the congregation | 6,763 ²⁹ |

Joly's chief argument was, that of the generalate's 47,385 dependents, many could not earn their keep, because of age, low intelligence or sickness. Thus the dependents who could work had to do long hours to make up the deficit between the order's income and its expenditure. Rivet, by contrast, said that when considering the Bon Pasteur's finances one should leave out anything to do with the houses overseas, because their circumstances were so different from those in France. By this he meant to destroy the argument of the prosecution against the refuge at Nancy, in which Lecoanet's lawyer had spoken of the generalate's total international workforce of 50,000 persons whose labour made the order rich. He strove to answer what he called the capital accusation, that the Bon Pasteur enriched itself to the detriment of its workers, both physically by very long hours and poor feeding and intellectually by the stupefying effect of repetitious labour. Both the apologists were satisfied that they were able to exonerate the institute from the grosser charges made against it. They found that the girls and women in its care were fed as well if not better than the poor in general and their hours of work, lower in the case of children, were not above the legal limit. Their evidence is nonetheless very much a matter of trust, for they cited no details not supplied them by the generalate itself. Neither of them appears to have interviewed the penitents privately, or to have personally examined the convent kitchens

²⁹ Joly, *Les Maisons. du Bon-Pasteur*, p.7.

and workrooms over a period of time. Worse, they do not mention the Cholet scandal of the previous decade, although Lecanuet's lawyer brought it up at the trial. If they took the attitude that Cholet had been an isolated incident, then why had its practice not come to the notice of the Mother General who resided only 60 kilometers away; why had she not, when doing her "domestic" accounts, noticed the enormous profits made by the Cholet refuge? According to Joly and Rivet, those profits would have been unique.

Their enquiries also brought to light the fact that even as late as 1903 the Assistance Publique all over France still put a few girls into the Bon Pasteur refuges, sometimes paying a daily rate averaging 0.60fr, sometimes a monthly rate of between 6 and 15 frs and sometimes giving a lump sum of one or two hundred francs with no further payments made. Joly drew the inference that the state was very glad to avail itself of the facilities of the various Bon Pasteur houses and their like at so cheap a rate. He also made it clear that the state-run homes for destitute children and young offenders, of which there were very few for girls, also had great difficulty in providing a *pécule* for those whom it allowed to leave. He mentioned with some pride that the Mother General of Angers (still Mother Marie de Sainte Marine Verger), after reading one of his articles, had founded an after-care home run by a respectable laywoman for the reception of girls leaving the refuge, who yet needed to learn a little more of the various branches of sewing in order to be able to earn their own living.³⁰ This information, although comforting to Joly, is an admission of one of the opposition's charges against the institute, that after years of work their inmates still had no saleable professional training. From the court case, it appeared that Lecoanet had been able to find work as a seamstress because she was one of the best in her class and had been given difficult work to do; those who were not so teachable apparently were allowed to specialise in very simple work, to the detriment of their future ability to earn.

To refer again to Rivet's case for Catholic charity, exemplified in his defence of the Bon Pasteur, he gave figures for the population of the generalate's French houses for the years 1898 to 1902 as follows:³¹

³⁰ Joly, *ibid*, p.22.

³¹ A Rivet, *La Vérité*, etc. Ch.V., p.80.

| | |
|----------------|-------|
| Nuns... .. | 1098 |
| Preservates | 3008 |
| Penitents 2698 | |
| Magdalens | 705 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 7509 |

During the preceding five years (1898-1902) the value of the work produced and sold by the above was calculated by Rivet at 1,074,160frs; the value of produce from the convent lands at 566,507frs; pensions paid by various bodies or private families at 186,073frs, making a total of 1,826,741fr in receipts. The expenses of the foundations were calculated by Rivet at 2,388,481fr, leaving a *deficit* of 561,7640fr. No figures from bills and receipts are directly quoted. As the reader has no copies of original documents put before him or her, it is difficult to accept Rivet's estimates, which naturally work out to prove his argument. Yet his calculation of the annual value of the work done by the women and girls is far too low, when the actual figure of 51,3000fr per annum gained by one single house at Cholet is put beside it. The historian must question his accounts, despite the fact that both he and Joly trusted the figures given them by the generalate, because of the sacred quality of the women whose work they were defending. Furthermore, among the receipts no figure was mentioned by either writer to represent the amount of interest earned by the accumulated dowries of the 6,763 religious sisters of the order, nor what sums were left to the institute annually by the deceased professed. All that was said in this regard was that very few rich dowries were brought into the convent "today".

Both writers emphasized that conditions of work for an independent seamstress or a female factory worker were harder than those endured by the inmates of the convents and that charitable institutions run by the state often spent less per day on their inmates than they claimed was done by the Bon Pasteur. But even if Joly and Rivet's arguments are accepted in the good faith in which they were made, one accusation by Mgr Turinaz remains virtually unanswered: the convents' budgets did not allow for a realistic amount of money and clothing to be given to those leaving an institution in which they had worked without pay. As those leaving them were all female, mostly without families, the convents

put them in a position of great moral danger by neglecting the girls' future material survival. This suggests that within them there was no real sympathy for the girls who rejected their offer to stay for life. The state-run institutions were no better; indeed the question of the *pécule* was not regulated by law until 1934. Until then both state and private establishments were free to decide if rather than how much they would give.³²

The methods of the refuge at Cholet, which implicate by association the houses of the Bon Pasteur generally, were not illegal as long as the establishment admitted that it was a commercial enterprise run for profit, but such an admission would not only cut off public sympathy but openly deny the *raison d'être* of the congregation. However there is a certain hypocrisy in a demand by government that a charitable house give its subjects better treatment than commercial enterprises, and yet will not strengthen that demand by exercising its right of inspection.

A point which was not stressed by either side in the disputes referred to above was that by Article 13 of the decree of 26 December 1810, civic authorities were required to visit all houses known as refuges every three months in order to check the registers and listen to any complaints from the inmates. This attempt to protect the interests of the girls kept by the convents soon fell into disuse (probably with the accession of Louis XVIII), as was admitted by the Garde des Sceaux in a circular letter to prefects of April 1907, in which he ordered the resumption of these periodical visits.³³

With regard to the punishments given to children in the refuges covered by this study, there is no indication that the various foundresses favoured physical punishment at any time, although periods of solitary confinement were sometimes administered at Laval, and therefore probably at the Miséricorde de Bordeaux also.³⁴, as Thérèse Rondeau copied the methods of her teacher, Mlle de Lamourous. Mother Pelletier had given very clear instructions to her sisters: "Let this prohibition last *always* and *for ever*. Never use harsh

³² See A. Rivet, *Etablissements de bienfaisance privés*, Paris, 1934.

³³ Arch.Nat.de Fr., BB18 6003/2.

³⁴ The "solitary" cell at the Miséricorde de Laval is now the archives room; it is small but not cramped, on the first floor with a small window overlooking the second inner courtyard of the house.

measures. It is well known that they do not correct and only make us guilty before God and man."³⁵ On 19 October 1899, when the state was investigating the Bon Pasteur de Nancy, these commands were reinforced by a circular to all houses from the Mother General, Sister Marie de Ste Marine Verger, forbidding anyone to "strike the children or allow them to be struck; we order the mistresses to be very strict on this point...Neither impose penances which bear in themselves a trace of oppression, like tying the hands, shutting up..."³⁶ That the mother general should have had to issue such directions to all her houses suggests that she knew that abuses existed, although no evidence was ever proved in court of brutality suffered by the inmates of the Bon Pasteur. Despite this, as the enquiry into Cholet demonstrates, children may be intimidated by small acts of spite which are very difficult to prove in court. In this area, as in that regarding food, sleep and clothing, so much must be accepted on trust that people end up believing what they want to believe. A girl's testimony may be easily discredited, particularly if she has come from a disreputable background or forms one of the many "poor creatures, disgraced or deformed, of slow intelligence, incurably timid or defenceless and weak" which the Bon Pasteur was always ready to take in, according to Joly.

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The theology of the refuge never entered the debates over the incidents mentioned above. When defending themselves the sisters wished to prove that they did care about the future of the children, did educate and equip them for the life outside. However it is a logical deduction from their world-view that precious money should not be wasted on those who went back to chaos - the universe outside the walls - but should be used by the system to produce fresh works of salvation, namely the creation of more or larger convent-refuges. Even the necessities of the girls' life - education, decent food, bedding - might reasonably be sacrificed so as to meet the expenses incurred in the attempt to save more souls from the

³⁵ Pelletier, *Conferences and Inst.* Ch. LX.

³⁶ A. Rivet, *Le Scandal du B-P*, footnote to p.135.

certainty of *everlasting* misery.

Neither the Miséricordes of Bordeaux and Laval nor the Refuge Sainte Anne at Chatillon made more than one or two dependent foundations during the nineteenth century, indeed the last-named refuge never even possessed a separate chapel. It has not been possible to find out what, if anything, they provided for girls leaving them after several years of work. In their case a plea of poverty would have been easier to accept if they had ever been challenged, indeed the house at Chatillon anticipated this in a publicity leaflet published either at the end of the last or at the beginning of the present century. Perhaps with recent scandals in mind the writer of the leaflet recounts that

A person of experience who was at the head of a large establishment in Paris managed to make a lot of money from the work of those she administered. She rebuked the Prioress one day and said "Why is it you do not make more money? Do you not know that, for a house to succeed, the work must provide largely for the food and clothing?" "How can you do that," said the Prioress, "if your children do not know how to work and are so weak that one must first take care of them?" "You make them work in any case, or else you make them leave".

This method will not and never can be ours.³⁷

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The Bon Pasteur's difference from other congregations who established refuges lay in its original leadership, an organising genius of magnetic power who took financial risks year after year, so great was her zeal for the expansion of her work. Her example was followed boldly by her successor, Mother Marie de St Pierre Coudenhove, who directed the generalate from October 1868 to her death in 1892. She founded 85 new houses, mostly outside Europe, and made thirteen new provinces including that of Oceania, which contains Australia. So it was that in the space of 65 years the generalate created 220 foundations over five continents, of which 34 were in France. Where did the money come from? Despite the fact that according to Joly the governments of the British Isles and North America did not tax the foundations, one must conclude that a great deal of the expense of

³⁷ Typed carbon copy of a document possibly of last century: *Notice sur l'Oeuvre du Refuge Sainte-Anne*. Archives of the house at Chatillon-sous-Bagneux.

buying or building and equipping these institutions must have come from money earned by the inmates, which includes, of course, the religious sisters. It appears obvious that the Mothers General had a choice: to provide assistance in money and in kind to all girls who left after spending some minimum period within the institution, so as to tide these girls over their difficulties in finding work, or to put all surplus income into new foundations so as to offer the chance of eternal salvation to the greatest number. No-one guided by the teaching of St John Eudes could doubt what the decision would be, for "A soul is worth more than a world" and to save it from hell

is the most worthy service and the greatest honour that they can render to God, and the most agreeable good work that they can do, for His Divine Majesty has nothing so much at heart as the salvation of souls.³⁸

The religious of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers were commanded to ponder frequently the above maxim and to accept it as "the first and most important of their Constitutions, the greatest of their obligations, the spirit and the soul of their Institute, the way that God has marked out for them."³⁹

Eudes did not want his daughters to concentrate on feeding or clothing poor women materially, but on "feeding and clothing them by good examples and holy instruction.". One might argue from this that *not* to spend every available franc on new foundations was a betrayal of the trust given by their founder, for whom "the most perfect expression of charity" consisted in drawing back souls from perdition. No-one in a position of authority in the Church, except Mgr Turinaz, appears to have asked whether a child that is overworked, meagerly fed and denied normal human contact, will listen to her mistresses when they try to make her believe that it is a loving God who has commanded them to behave towards her as they do. Yet, as the Mother General remarked to Joly, the order treated its penitents no worse than factories or state-run institutions.⁴⁰ Coming from her, however, this is not a legitimate defence, for the order presented itself as doing a

³⁸ *Constitutions de Saint-Augustin et constitutions pour les religieuses du Bon Pasteur d'Angers*, Rome, 1836, Headings I and part of III under "SAVOIR", which is part of Constitution I.

³⁹ Heading X under "SAVOIR" in the same.

⁴⁰ H. Joly, *Les maisons du B-P*, p.33.

redemptive work, not as a business enterprise. The evidence of the Cholet documents suggests that an imbalance had developed within the congregation. With regard to the girls in their care, the foundress urged her novices to "Love them much, very much. Console and strengthen these suffering sheep; make them by God's grace happy, very happy; this is your duty".⁴¹ Yet in order to make as much money from their labour as possible, and so spread its foundations throughout the whole world, the very girls the order existed to redeem were treated with a harshness that would hinder conversion. There is little evidence of any care given to Victoire Samson's mental and spiritual needs, and how readily would the eight-year-old Félicité Arnoul face the world after thirteen years' hard labour and mental stagnation in the Bon Pasteur workforce, whose members were not even allowed freedom to talk among themselves for more than two hours a day?

The Cholet case raises the question of how much responsibility the local bishop had for conditions in the generalate's refuges. Were the ecclesiastical superiors of the Bon Pasteur houses aware of how much profit was being made by the work of those confined there? If not, and the financial details were only known in full by the Mother General, did she commend without question the heads of daughter houses which contributed the largest amounts of money to the general fund? Was there an element of competition between the various houses? Was possession of an imposing new chapel a source of pride and self-gratification to the members of a female community, a mark of their respectability and success as important for them as contributing to new foundations? More important than the children's physical wellbeing?

With regard to the Bon Pasteur, it is impossible that a person of Mother Pelletier's force of character would not have provided after-care for all those who left her convents, if she had thought the ability to live independently in the world was necessary for the girls' salvation. To have done so might have been far less costly than to pursue her actual programme, which was to establish internationally, at great cost in money and human

⁴¹ A quotation from the *Conferences* of Mother Pelletier on p.42 of *Characteristics of the Spirituality of St John Eudes and St Mary Euphrasia in the light of Vatican Council II; a series of research papers*, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, New York Province, undated.

effort, large congregations of sisters in charge of large numbers of dependents, who were kept for years or even for life. Not only she, but other Catholics of her century attempted similar missionary activities, believing that the harder the demands made on the body, the more the work corresponded with the will of God. This attitude towards suffering lends itself to the practice of severity within one's sphere of authority, although it does not excuse it. It connects nineteenth-century French Catholics with the early Church Fathers, via the reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who accepted without question the latter's interpretation of the body's contemptible significance. Thus this chapter which closes the narration leads back to the opening one, which dealt with the direction taken by primitive Christianity in relation to the flesh and its needs. The treatment of the labour force within a convent-refuge was only a contemporary expression of the Church's ancient understanding of what constituted "the good", an understanding which the secular world had largely rejected and would continue to reject into the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Christianity is unique among world religions in its demand for a single standard of morality for both sexes among the laity. It not only expects all wives to be virgins before marriage and completely faithful to one marriage partner, but has stated that these restraints should also be borne by men, despite the traditional polygamy of the Old Testament patriarchs. Even more (although the faith is not unique in this), the fact that Christ was celibate has been taken until recently to vindicate the concept that wholeness, or holiness, is not attained unless sexuality is completely sublimated. This necessarily has left women at a spiritual disadvantage, for their special childbearing function is normally impossible without sexual union: therefore women have been judged to be by nature more bound to the life of the flesh than men, with a disturbing power to arouse desire in the opposite sex with or without a man's conscious will. Unfortunately the Church did not select this natural quality as a sign of the genius of the creator, rather of the cunning of his adversary. The early Church accepted chastity as innately more commendable than sexual experience, yet in the person of Augustine, one of its most influential theologians, it also accepted the prostitute's existence as necessary to public order.

The life of one woman, however, was seen to justify the existence of the whole sex: the Virgin Mary alone was spared the universal taint of the female. In the Catholic nations she has been the model of perfection set before all Christian women, a mother who had never experienced a complete married life, or rather, as the Church would have it, one who had never lost her purity. The adoption of her as a role model early in the Church's history has presented her daughters with an impossible goal, for who except she can be both virgin and mother? To state the case at its most simple level, the images of Christ and Mary, as they have been presented by Christian theologians over the centuries, inevitably devalue sexual intercourse, and with it sexual love, leaving the married state in need of justification by the birth of children. These values have penetrated Western culture deeply, as is shown in the case of women, whose subject condition in the family, supported by religious doctrine, has left them vulnerable to

physical repression and heavy sanctions against the unauthorised loss of virginity. The very fact that it was possible to keep most women chaste throughout their whole lives has encouraged the association of feminine obedience with virtue, and virtue with lack of sexual experience.

In the case of men, apart from those who took formal religious vows, control has been much more difficult, since the male head of a family was subject to no-one within his private circle. Also, despite the teaching of the Church, it is commonly accepted that marriage is not a perfect remedy for unchastity among men. Although adult males have always combined to police each other where breaking the law is concerned, to compel each other to practise virginity followed by strict monogamy has always proved beyond them. Christian society has accepted that what is impossible to prevent cannot be called a crime, although it has conceded that sexual sins are deeply offensive to God, even when only entertained as mental fantasies.

Where most men will not observe the same sexual standards as their wives and daughters, yet must not let it appear openly that they will not, the least socially disruptive solution to the problem made by their sexual demands would seem to be either that they should make private homosexual liaisons, or induce some women for love or money to be their partners in necessarily disgraceful sexual acts. As the Church has always considered homosexuality a much graver sin than simple fornication, female prostitution has necessarily been regarded as the lesser of two evils and one that has been tolerated if not approved within all Christian nations.

In those societies whose religious life has been dominated by the Roman Catholic Church the temptation to seek sexual pleasure outside marriage has been combatted by very grave sanctions: sexual sins are all mortal sins and to die unabsolved from even one was to incur the penalty of eternal torment. The enormous weight of this penalty on the conscience of a believer is now almost incomprehensible to the modern mind, distanced as it is from the fear of God by the power of medical and agricultural technology. To think in terms of an eternal destiny has become an alien concept in the formerly Christian West; material hells are recognised as existing, but the greater our

perception of them the more we are convinced that they have no right to be. They are no longer accepted as punishments imposed by an external power but as challenges to human knowledge and compassion.

This is one reason why the survival and multiplication of the convent refuge in so advanced a society as nineteenth century France can seem merely an anachronism, irrelevant to the nation's historical development. But it is not so. It was an indication of the power that theology still retained at that time over the relationship between men and women in that society, a destructive power in the case of those females who were judged to occupy a place in it than which nothing was more sordid, miserable, shameful and dishonourable.¹ In other words the convent refuges of France were concrete examples of the rejection of sexuality embedded in Christian theology. But they were at the same time examples of another of its teachings, that one must have mercy on the sinner, however low she has fallen, and strive to lead her back to salvation. By the physical hardship, severity and dullness of the disciplines imposed on their penitents and preservatives, and the inadequacy of the professional training given, the Church expressed its conviction that this salvation lay, for these women, in the rejection of the body and the world. It was not interested in the future of those who could not adapt to a life only suitable for a cloistered nun.

The spirituality that sustained the religious sisters who staffed the refuges rested on four premises: one, that physical suffering is God's will for mankind and has a redemptive value proportionate to its severity, if devoutly accepted by the sufferer; two, that sexual experience outside marriage is the greatest moral pollution that a woman might bring on herself; three, that damnation is a real and ever-present danger, even to Christians; and four, that the mercy and grace of God are always available to those who sincerely repent, whatever their previous moral life has been. Once these points are accepted, it is obvious that the Church has a plain duty to provide institutions for the rescue of those lost women necessarily degraded for the sake of social order.

Yet there was very little done. The first refuge in France, begun in the Convent of

¹ Augustine, *De Ordine*; see p. of Ch. I.

St Antoine by Foulques de Neuilly at the end of the twelfth century, was the earliest known in Western Europe. Was this a sign that the sexually disgraced female was always seen as so morally repulsive, that few of her sex would accept to be put in charge of her, or was it that in former centuries, before the Reformation and the appearance of syphilis in the West, there was a certain amount of toleration for *madeleines*? Jacques Rossiaud has argued the latter case, having found in his study of South-East France in the fifteenth century that women were regularly forced into prostitution with the connivance of the civic authorities, but were released from the town brothel by the age of thirty to re-enter society with, he believed, no prejudice to their chances of marriage or employment.²

In the seventeenth century the climate of opinion became harsher around the disgraced girl or public woman. Despite St John Eudes' creation of a special order of nuns for the work of spiritual rescue among them in 1641, France did not see a great expansion of this specialised missionary work until the nineteenth century, when Mother St Euphrasie Pelletier's generalate spread throughout Europe and overseas. Its career embodies the greatest effort made by a French congregation, or any congregation, to provide a ministry to women and girls marginalised by actual prostitution or the pollution of some sexual disgrace.

Unfortunately the theological interpretation of the problem presented by the existence of these unfortunates had not evolved over the centuries. The most recent study of French Catholic moral theology in the nineteenth century has shown that the presentation of Christianity as "a difficult and demanding religion" was only modified in that emphasis was swung away from the fearsome nature of God's justice to the merciful nature of his love. No change has been registered with regard to the attitude of the Church towards sexuality. This rigidity was reflected in the treatment given to the penitents by all the congregations referred to in this thesis, which together were responsible for almost all refuge work in France. No account was taken of the circumstances prior to the entry of these destitute women and girls. They were

² J. Rossiaud, *Prostitution, jeunesse et sexualité, etc.*, *Annales*, 1976, np. 2, p. 289.

forbidden to discuss their former lives except in the confessional, where the dialogue is always directed by the priest and the idea of sin predominates. Outside the confessional they were subjected to a practice of infantilisation, whatever their age. Treated always as junior members of the community, however much they may have been valued, they were never allowed to reach their majority; they were not taken seriously as adults who might have had an explanation of their lives to give. The daily routine inside the refuges was stultifying to all save the few who had a religious vocation, and it was so not only within those controlled by small and relatively unknown congregations, but also inside those belonging to the largest order, whose mothers superior looked to the Jesuits, the missionary arm of revived nineteenth-century Catholicism, for spiritual direction.

The life open to the subject population was composed of elements of the prison, the convent boarding school and the commercial *atelier*. In the refuges founded by Lamourous and Rondeau a deliberate effort was made to keep the numbers of the staff low, so as to prevent the formation of a body of sisters apart from the penitents. There is some evidence that in these two houses there was a greater opportunity for the girls and women brought in to feel that they belonged to a caring community. In Chupin's refuge this effort was frustrated by clerical pressure: in the older congregations, those of the Sisters of St Thomas de Villeneuve, of Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge and Notre Dame du Bon Pasteur d'Angers, the intention was always that the sisters should be able to maintain a life apart. Whether their ability to do so was detrimental to women and girls in their care is not known.

The evidence presented in this thesis, although far from complete, suggests that the nuns and lay sisters who maintained the refuges thought that their "children" were usually too morally frail to be allowed to return to the outside world. Although the other congregations refused to allow their archives to be examined, the one that did, the Misericorde of Bordeaux, provides evidence that very few girls were helped to find outside work by the mother superior, because so many of them fell back into temptation once outside in the world. The institution at Laval which closely resembled that of Bordeaux was also very reluctant to help its penitents find employment by local citizens,

because, we are told by a police doctor who knew the refuge well, the girls fell back into their old ways in almost every case. This was seen by him, as well as by the nuns, only as an indication of their moral frailty, not of their friendlessness. The doctor added that the work of conversion undertaken by the sisters was completely unsuitable for any but those who already were possessed of good moral principles, but whom a moment of weakness had undone. The others, he believed, had been morally destroyed by their early lives.³ We would see the problem differently today. We might say that girls who already believed themselves to be unworthy of respect, who were told how weak and sinful they were in the course of the religious exercises which marked every division of their time, were programmed in advance to fail if they returned to the world, even if their material disadvantages had not been so great.

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All anecdotal evidence from whatever source regarding the penitents' personal experience - and there is nothing but unsubstantiated anecdotal evidence available on this subject - suggests that they fell into three types. First, those who found life in the convent bearable or even attractive; these often lived to a great age. Second, those who, although wishing to leave, were persuaded to stay to their everlasting benefit, as proved by the poor health and holy death which usually followed their decision. Third, those who insisted on leaving (desperately fought to leave in some cases), a wrong decision which was repented of years later, when, dying, they begged the refuge to take them in for the last time. There are no anecdotes which show the girls justified by a decision to leave, or remaining impenitent on their deathbeds. Indeed the girls' stories, as presented in the accounts of the foundresses' lives, are similar in sentiment and pathos to that of the heroine of Sue's *Mystères* or of Victor Hugo's *Fantine*. They reinforce what the Church had been saying through the medium of the convent refuge since the seventeenth century, that there was no acceptable earthly future for a woman who had been sexually

³ Homo, H. *Prostitution en Chateau-Gontier, etc.*, pp. 152, 153.

disgraced. Outside a convent she would not be able to live virtuously, in fact she was better off dead. The Church would add, "for she will eventually know eternal happiness". In the works of the popular romantic writers, Hugo and Sue, the disgraced heroine's death-bed scenes do not suggest that to die is a tragedy, but rather a solution to her problems, showing how effectively the authors had internalised the theological view of the *madeleine*. In Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, and in works on a similar theme by writers of the naturalist school, no such ending was possible, because the authors had rejected Christianity. With regard to their heroines' worldly prospects, however, they were as pessimistic as the Church: their narratives show the prostitute suffering an early death or facing a future unrelieved by hope. Was this purely the effect of factual observation, or were they presenting to society what society expected to see, albeit told without sentimentality?

Does the information in the thesis support the same conclusion? Can we assert that the children of the refuge benefited or were disadvantaged by the treatment they received? The evidence is conflicting. All published sources on prostitution which mention the refuges, even the works of Parent-Duchâtelet and Homo, say that they were doing a much needed work, yet no author except Dumas, writing for the Refuge Sainte Anne, gave actual figures for either genuine conversions to the monastic life or successful re-entry into the world outside, and even Dumas' totals were misleading. The registers of the Misericorde of Bordeaux show that in the first twenty years of its operation a third of the entrants left of their own volition, mostly during the first year, and almost all the rest of that third by the end of the second year. The register for the next twenty years shows similar behaviour from 40% of the girls and women taken in. These "independent exits" were made by girls who had no money or employment to go back to, and probably no family either. Details given in Register II (which were not included in Register I) show that only 35% of all entrants had both parents living. Many of those who stayed may have done so because they developed poor health, as the figure for deaths is highest between the second and fifth year of residence. Parent-Duchâtelet also found that the girls sent to the Maison du Bon Pasteur in Paris often left before two

years were up. Drs Homo and Venot, both of whom were employed by the state to give medical treatment to registered prostitutes, expressed their opinion that these women usually only made use of a refuge in hard times; that the strict discipline and frequent religious exercises discouraged any wish to stay. The informants listed in the Prostitution Dossier at the Bibliothèque Marguérite Durand are hostile to the refuges, where they mention them at all. Those who do claimed to have been placed in them during childhood, but to have been keen to leave on their majority. All testified that they were allowed to leave after years of work inside the institution without any lump sum of money given them at the end of their stay, nor any introductions to help them begin life afresh, thereby confirming the statements to that effect of Mgr Turinaz of Nantes regarding the congregation of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers in his diocese.

This last point is the most serious charge against the claim of the Church that the convent refuges were works of mercy. After conceding that, according to Rivet and Gaillac, no secular charitable institution in nineteenth century France gave adequate after-care to those who graduated from it, the accusation of indifference or outright cruelty still rests because the refuges were supposed to express the compassion of God to the unfortunate sinners in their charge. But in what way should the mercy of God be expressed? This is where the third premise on which the refuges were based demonstrates its destructive logic. If all sinners are in daily danger of losing their souls, particularly if they are of weak moral fibre, no encouragement should be given them to stray from a place of assured salvation, which in the case of the penitents and preservatives was the refuge itself. To help them re-enter worldly life would be to waste the effort and money spent on their rescue, for once they are outside they will again commit the sins of the flesh and will go to eternal damnation. Therefore it is not true mercy to encourage them to leave the life of penitence that the refuge offers. To admit that it is good to help women who do leave the refuge to attain some measure of respectable independence, whether or not they remain faithful Catholics, is to suggest that the doctrine of damnation is not of first importance, therefore not true in the fundamental sense. As the revival of Catholicism in nineteenth-century France was

based on a fundamental interpretation of the Scriptures and of the mediating role of the Church, the nuns who had dedicated their lives to its service could not be expected to reinforce anything counter to the traditional doctrines.

Is it possible to judge the worth of the convent refuges to society and to the women and girls taken in by them? The scandal at Cholet which came to a climax in 1888 demonstrates that despite clear evidence of exploitation the Ministry of the Interior was by no means ready to provide alternative shelter for the 207 destitute young females whom it contained, although it had removed state wards convicted under articles 66 and 67 of the Code Pénal from the care of all save a few minor female congregations in 1885.⁴ This removal did not cover any girls put into a convent refuge as a function of *correction paternelle*, by means of which a head of family might imprison his or her child in its minority for a period of at least six months. Henri Joly, writing in 1901, said that the Assistance publique was only too glad to put any "vicious" girls over whom it had authority into the nearest Bon Pasteur.⁵ Obviously remedial homes were needed rather than penitentiary establishments, but none were established by the state for girls until the end of the nineteenth century. Of these the correctional centres opened at Nevers (1881), Auberive (1886), Fouilleuse (1887) and Cadillac (1890) were each closed within a few years of opening because houses with male supervisory staff proved unsatisfactory.⁶ Only the centre at Doullens (1891) was successful. Despite the removal of the girls convicted under sections 66 and 67 of the Code, convent refuges continued to relieve the state of the care of girls judged in need of remedial education well beyond the nineteenth century. From 1886 to 1900 the annual figure reached 1000 only once, but never fell below 500. The evidence available with regard to the Misericordes of Laval and Bordeaux shows that a girl could be put in by a parent or

⁴ In the following year the General Council of the Department of the Seine broke its agreement with the congregation of N.D. de Charité du Refuge where by it paid the sisters 60 centimes a day for each girl held on its behalf in the convent of the Madeleine.

⁵ In 1889 and 1898 laws were enacted to enable the Assistance Publique to assume parental powers (with parental consent) over children who were ill-treated, in moral danger, or beyond parental control.

⁶ Gaillac wrote that at this time the slogan *Maison de correction, maison de corruption* was invented. See his *Maisons de correction*, p. 172.

sponsor until her majority even without payment, and the same was true with regard to the Maison du Bon Pasteur in the rue d'Enfer. The example of the contract signed by the mother of Marie-Antoinette and Félicité-Constance Simon with the Bon Pasteur de Cholet, taken in conjunction with the request by Mélanie Fleury's father to have his daughter "shut up" at the Misericorde of Laval suggest that a convent refuge was a resource used by the poor to safeguard themselves or their children from want or from being given a bad name. Madame Simon was promised by the contract she signed that her daughters would be taught dressmaking. The state, too, had the right to suppose that children put into an "authorised" refuge would be taught a skill which would enable them to support themselves later in life, therefore it could be argued by friends of the congregations that the refuges helped lower the numbers of the destitute female poor and indirectly those of prostitutes. Whether or not this happened was largely a matter of trust. The state had the right to inspect but did not require evidence that the local public prosecutor had done so until 1912. As it also had no means of providing for the hundreds or thousands of women and girls kept in the refuges, its protests against ill-treatment were likely to be confined to threats. It had to take into account the political damage that an attack on a female congregation could do. The examples of the Bon Pasteur houses at Cholet and Nantes show in the first case that the congregation could depend upon the local bishop to defend it, which in turn aroused the support of the churchgoers in the area, and in the second, where the bishop himself had brought the accusation, that Rome was prepared to step in and declare the sisterhood innocent. This last point is related to the phenomenon of the role of the female congregations in nineteenth century France.

The decision of Gregory XVI early in the century to permit female congregations to organise themselves into generalates was of far-reaching importance to French society, coinciding with a new urgency in the national Church to establish its authority among the poor. It was favourable to the enterprise of foundresses of wide vision, relieving them from obedience to a merely local bishop and relating them to the papacy, thus strengthening the ultramontane and reactionary structures being erected with the

Church of France. The enormous flowering of vocations among women who wished to serve religion actively, contributed to the Church's ability to establish a strong religious presence within structures formerly considered of marginal importance under the *ancien régime*, but which had become areas of growth and public concern after the Revolution. By the end of the 1830's the ruling classes' perception of the needs of the poor, and their recent experience of its power when maddened by social injustice, made them appreciative of the willingness of female congregations to provide dedicated, well-organised and cheap labour in prisons, hospitals, orphanages, sheltered workshops, schools for working-class girls and refuges. The reference to the Marie-Joseph Sisters in Chapter II and to the extension of the Bon Pasteur generalate described in Chapter IV illustrate this. A male-dominated state, armed with the Code Napoléon to repress the civic liberty of married women, had reaped an unforeseen benefit: over the whole century roughly 200,000 females (according to Langlois) rejected the idea of matrimony in order to take the veil, not, in most cases, so that they might rise above the material by mysticism, but so that they might do meaningful, active work in the world. While the Church found it hard to recruit men from the middle and upper classes, the latter gave it large numbers of their educated women, thus permitting organised catholicism in France to maintain close links with the governing classes and yet spread its domain among the people more widely. Yet modern French social history shows that the masses, despite what they saw of Christian charity mediated by the sisters, turned to politics not the Church for the things that belonged to their peace. One of the reasons that suggests itself is that political thinkers, both male and female, spoke to the poor as to adults, whereas the stultifying tendency of nineteenth century Catholicism was to address them as children, spiritual weaklings who needed fatherly guidance. This is illustrated perfectly in the life prescribed for the daughters of the poor in the refuges, who were subject to a severe, paternalistic interpretation of Christian social care, where tender love was equated with the enforcement of a life-denying discipline, and where hierarchical distinctions which limited the subjects to the lower ranks were permanently in operation.

Among nurses it is said that a hospital may be judged by the treatment given to the

most helpless, least visited of its patients. Perhaps a Church may be seen more clearly in the light of its treatment of the most friendless and uneducated of those it is allowed to control. The denial of adult status to the "children" of the convent refuges, the refusal to take note of their past experiences, the insistence that they were sinners who had nothing to expect but ruin from the world of men, the exaggerated value put upon what was called a holy death, all these phenomena made it almost impossible that any but the most passive women, or those with a genuine religious vocation, could tolerate the life inside the house without being constantly subject to boredom and the temptation to rebel. Yet the Church in France, which had far greater access through its clergy to the internal working of the refuges, encouraged their spread. The state also licensed the more successful of them and in the case of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers entrusted them with part of the female population of its detention centres. Whereas Michel Foucault would have seen this as part of the great bourgeois conspiracy to punish and oversee the lower orders as a whole, the contention of this thesis is that it demonstrates the effect of the moral theology that lay behind a nation's ideas of good and evil.

+ * + * + * + * + * +

This work has been written with more than one argument in mind. Its obvious purpose was to describe as fully as possible a number of French convent refuges in the nineteenth century, so as to provide an illustration of the type of the institution, and then to show that its efforts to improve the lot of a certain group of disadvantaged women and girls were, in modern terms, virtually useless. The description of the type also included the thesis that both the Church and the state in France had opportunity to know how the penitents and preservatives were treated and that they willingly allowed the expansion of the work.

Finally, this attempt to write with relevance about an institution apparently alien to contemporary Western culture is meant to provide an example of how deeply theological interpretations of reality have influenced the treatment of a certain type of marginalised

woman in France. The convent refuges were not unique to that nation, however. Other states whose ethics stem from Christianity, including Australia, welcomed the establishment of refuges within them. The final contention of this thesis is, therefore, that theology is a powerful influence on human society and that it should be presented as such to students of history with as much seriousness as political ideologies receive. It should be presented with force, even with passion, because its effects on us have been and are profound; we cannot understand our historical development or see our present situation clearly without taking its centuries-old influence into account.

Appendix to Chapter I

Table of the sins of lust: mortal sins in descending order of gravity

1) simple fornication: relations of an unmarried man with an unmarried woman, a widow, a prostitute or a concubine.

2) adultery: ...relations of a married man with a married woman other than his wife.

3) stupration: defloration of a virgin.

4) sacrilege: the violation by a sexual act of a consecrated person, place or thing (with a priest, a nun, in a church, etc.)

5) incest: with a relation consanguinous to the fourth degree, with a spiritual relation (after baptism, confirmation or confession, with a spiritual daughter)

6) rape: with or without defloration

7) sin against nature: a sexual act from which procreation is excluded. It is said to be against nature because it is repugnant not only to reason but also to the natural order and to the manner in which God has willed that one and the other sex be united for the propagation of the human species.

Kinds:

Voluntary pollution: coitus interrupted by artificial means or expelled prior to intercourse

Sodomy:

abominable crime between two beings of the same sex

Bestiality:

coupling with a creature other than man, namely animals, devils, succubi or incubi

Fellatio:

execrable (with tongue or mouth)

Appendices to Chapter II -

Appendix A - The prostitute's card (Translation follows)

PREFECTURE DE POLICE

1e Division 2e Bureau 3e Section

OBLIGATIONS ET DEFENSES IMPOSEES AUX FEMMES PUBLIQUES

Les filles publiques en carte sont tenues de se présenter, une fois au moins tous les quinze jours, au dispensaire de salubrité pour être visités.

Il leur est enjoint d'exhiber leur carte à toute réquisition des officiels et agents de police.

Il leur est défendu de provoquer à la débauche pendant le jour; elles ne pourront entrer en circulation sur la voie publique, qu'une demi-heure après l'heure fixée pour le commencement de l'allumage des reverbères, et, en aucune saison, avant sept heures du soir, et y rester après onze heures

Elles doivent avoir une mise simple et décente qui ne puisse attirer les regards, soit par la richesse ou les couleurs écatantes des étoffes, soit par les modes exagérées.

La coiffure en cheveux leur est interdite.

Défense expresse leur est faite de parler à des hommes accompagnés de femmes ou d'enfants, et d'adresser à qui que ce soit des provocations à haute voix ou avec insistance.

Elles ne peuvent, à quelque heure et sous quelque prétexte que ce soit, se montrer à leurs fenêtres, qui doivent être tenues constamment fermées et garnies de rideaux.

Il leur est défendu de stationner sur la voie publique, d'y former des groupes, d'y circuler en réunion, d'aller et venir dans un espace trop resserré, et de se faire suivre ou accompagner par des hommes.

Les pourtours et abords des églises et temples, à distance de vingt mètres au moins, les passages couverts, les boulevards de la rue Montmartre à la Madeleine, les Champs-Élysées, les jardins et abords du Palais-Royal, des Tuileries, du Luxembourg, et le Jardin des Plantes leur sont interdits. L'esplanade des Invalides, les quais, les ponts, et généralement les rues et lieux déserts et obscurs leur sont également interdits.

Il leur est expressément défendu de fréquenter les établissements publics ou maisons particulières où l'on favoriserait clandestinement la prostitution, et les tables d'hôte, de prendre domicile dans les maisons où existent des pensionnats ou externats, et d'exercer en dehors du quartier qu'elles habitent.

Il leur est également défendu de partager leur logement avec un concubinaire ou avec une autre fille, ou de loger en garni sans autorisation. Dans le cas où elles obtiendraient cette autorisation, il leur est expressément interdit de se prostituer dans le garni.

Les filles publiques s'abstiendront, lorsqu'elles seront dans leur domicile, de tout ce qui pourrait donner lieu à des plaintes des voisins ou des passants.

Celles qui contreviendront aux dispositions qui précèdent, celles qui résisteront aux agents de l'autorité, celles qui donneront de fausses indications de demeure ou de noms, encourront des peines proportionnées à la gravité des cas.

AVIS IMPORTANT - Les filles inscrites peuvent obtenir d'être rayées des contrôles de la prostitution, sur leur demande, et s'il est établi par une vérification, faite d'ailleurs avec discrétion et réserve, qu'elles ont cessé de se livrer à la débauche.

Reproduced on p. 69 of Emile Richard's *La Prostitution à Paris*, Baillièrre et Fils, Paris, 1890. The details conform with Parent's description of this card in the book published by him 56 years earlier.

Translation:

OBLIGATIONS AND PROHIBITIONS IMPOSED ON PUBLIC WOMEN

Public women who hold cards are required to present themselves at least once every fortnight at the dispensary in order to be inspected.

It is also required that they show their card on every demand of officers and agents of the police.

They are forbidden to provoke debauchery during the day; they may not become part of the traffic on the public footpath except half an hour after the set time for the lighting of street lamps and at no time before seven in the evening, nor stay beyond eleven at night.

They must be dressed simply and with decency in a manner not to attract attention either by the richness or brightly coloured fabric of their dress, or by an exaggerated fashion.

They must not go bare-headed.

They are expressly forbidden to speak to men accompanied by women or children, or to solicit anyone at all insistently or in a loud voice.

They must not show themselves at their windows, no matter what the hour nor under any pretext; the said windows shall be kept constantly closed and curtained.

They are forbidden to station themselves along the public footpath, to form groups there, to meet friends there, to walk up and down in too small an area, to allow themselves to be followed or accompanied by men.

The area surrounding churches and other places of worship to a distance of at least twenty metres, covered passages, the boulevards from the rue Montmartre to the Madeleine, the Champs Elysées, the gardens and surroundings of the Palais Royal; the Tuileries, the Luxembourg and the Botanical Gardens are forbidden to them. The Esplanade of the Invalides, quays, bridges and in general all dark and deserted streets and places are equally out of bounds.

They are strictly forbidden to frequent public or private establishments which favour clandestine prostitution, neither to visit public eating places (tables d'hôte) or to live in houses inhabited by students or to practise outside the area (quartier) in which they live.

They are also forbidden to share their lodging with a man or with another prostitute or to live in a boarding house without authorisation. In the case where they obtain such authorisation it is expressly forbidden them to practise prostitution in the boarding house.

Public women when at home, shall abstain for all conduct liable to cause neighbours or passers-by to lodge complaints against them.

Those women who contravene the preceding regulations, those who resist the police, those who give false names or addresses, will incur penalties in proportion to the gravity of the case.

IMPORTANT NOTICE Registered prostitutes may have themselves struck off the register on their request, and if it is established with the help of proof, which shall be furnished with discretion and reserve, that they have ceased to give themselves up to debauchery.

Chapter II - Appendix B

The budget for the prison of Saint Lazare in 1839, from Dossier EB.91 in the archives of the Prefecture of Police, Paris. Unfortunately this budget is the only one preserved in the archives. It covers a year when Delessert was Prefect.

Budget of Saint Lazare 1839 - Common to whole prison

| | Salary |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 1 Director | 5000 |
| 1 Chaplain | 2000 |
| 1 Principal female inspector | 1500 |
| 1 Brigadier | 1400 |
| 7 Surveillants @ 1,100frs | 7700 |
| 1 female inspector of Office of Works | 200 |
| 1 female surveillant of same | 1000 |
| 4 male servants @ 800frs | 3200 |
| 1 female in charge of canteen | 1200 |

First Section - women sentenced and awaiting trial

| | |
|---|------|
| 1 clerk (commis-greffier) | 1800 |
| 1 clerk 2nd class | 1500 |
| 1 clerk 3rd class | 1200 |
| 1 doctor | 1200 |
| 3 female inspectors @ 1000frs | 3000 |
| 3 female overseers (including one nurse) 1 @ 1000frs and 2 @ 800frs | 2600 |
| 4 female guardians @ 800frs | 3200 |

Second Section - Public women

| | |
|---|------|
| 1 clerk (commis greffier) | 1800 |
| 1 clerk 2nd class | 1500 |
| 2 doctors @ 1500frs | 3000 |
| 2 nursing aides @ 1000frs | 2000 |
| 1 pharmacist | 1200 |
| 3 female inspectors (1 at infirmary) @1000frs | 3000 |
| 3 female overseers, 1 @ 1000 and 2 @ 800frs | 2600 |
| 6 female guardians @ 800frs | 4800 |

Third Section - Young Women

| | |
|---|------|
| 1 female inspector | 1200 |
| 3 female overseers 1 @ 1000 and 2 @ 800frs | 2600 |
| 2 female guardians @ 800frs | 1600 |
| Salaries of 32 female prisoners employed as helpers | 3960 |

Total: 67,960frs

Section for detained girls and for the Correction Paternelle

| | |
|---|------|
| 1 director | 5000 |
| 1 chaplain | 2000 |
| 1 doctor | 1100 |
| 1 clerk (commis-greffier)
functioning as a teacher | 2400 |
| 1 clerk, 2nd class, as above | 500 |
| 1 clerk, 3rd class | 1200 |
| 1 male principal inspector | 1500 |
| 7 male inspectors of quartiers
@ 1200frs | 8400 |
| 11 male overseers (1 principal
@ 1200frs) | 2200 |
| 10 male servants @ 900frs | 9000 |
| 1 Pharmacist/nurse | 1200 |
| 1 laundrymaid | 800 |
| 1 male guard/porter | 600 |
| Salaries of 9 female prisoners
employed as helpers | 876 |

Total 48,076frs

Appendices to Chapter IV

Appendix A

Copy of the document supplied by the sœur archviste of the Congrégation de St Thomas de Villeneuve in April 1985.

Extrait d'un des Registres d'entrée intitulé 'ŒUVRE DU BON PASTEUR'

Pour la période de 1840 à 1850

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Nombre d'entrées | 274 |
| Age moyen d'admission: | entre 16 et 30 ans et 1 de 13 ans restée jusqu'à 27 ans |
| Origine: | Viennent de St Lazare
de la Correction de St Lazare
de la Correction de la Madelaine
sont admises par Madame de Vignolles, présidente de |
| 'Œuvre | viennent de leur plain gré |
| Lieu d'origine: | de partout en France, surtout du Nord et de l'Est |
| quelques- | Une, Sr Zoé, vient de l'Île Maurice-Inde-et |
| Causes de sortie: | unes viennent de l'étranger
rendues à leurs parent
placement (sans indication de lieu)
rendue à la police (1845)
rendue à la préfecture
placée à l'Ourcine 1844 - beaucoup y ont été placées
mise à la Salpêtrière 1842: une Sicilienne
entrée à l'Hospice des Enfants malades en 1842 comme
infirmière |
| Restées définitivement: | 48 pendant ces dix années |
| QUELQUES NOMS:
décédée | Embert, Louise, enfant trouvée, 20 ans, 1839-1841;
Millard, Hortense, Sr Laurence, 13 ans, 1839-1843
Broudet, Jeannette, Sr Etienne, 16 ans, 1840 pas de
date de sortie
Jacquin, Augustine, Sr Tharsille, 19 ans, restée 4 jours |

Appendices to Chapter IV

Appendix B

Figures provided by Br Antoine Bru, taken from the registers of the Miséricorde de Laval

Number of females who entered the house between 1818 and 1841 - 627

Number who left voluntarily - 297

Of this group the age at entry was as follows:

| Age group | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1-10 | 14 |
| 11-20 | 163 |
| 21-30 | 92 |
| 31-40 | 18 |
| 41-50 | 10 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 297 |
| | <hr/> |

Number who died while in residence before or after 1841 - 330

Of this group the age at entry was as follows:

| Age group | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1-10 | 19 |
| 11-20 | 195 |
| 21-30 | 86 |
| 31-40 | 22 |
| 41-50 | 8 |
| | <hr/> |
| | 330 |
| | <hr/> |

Appendices to Chapter V

A - Report from the Ministre des Cultes to Napoleon I

B - The decree of 26 December 1810

Rapport à Sa Majesté l'Empereur et Roi,
Protecteur de la Confédération du Rhin.
Paris, le 3 Janvier 1810

Sire,

Par son Décret du 18 février 1809 Votre Majesté a statué sur l'organisation générale des hospitalières.

Je lui propose maintenant de prononcer sur l'institution des Sœurs du Refuge.

Elles ont déjà été considérées par les Décrets de Votre Majesté et par son petit Conseil, comme dignes de la même protection.

Il existait anciennement plusieurs de ces maisons en France. Elles sont maintenant plus nécessaires, sur-tout, depuis que l'instruction de la dernière classe du peuple a souffert une interruption de plusieurs années.

La débauche ravie tous les jours aux familles des filles victimes de la séduction et du mauvais exemple. Leurs dérèglements sont aussitôt suivis d'une misère profonde, de maladies infâmes.

En vain auraient-elles la volonté de sortir de cet abyme de maux: La Société les rejette, leurs parens que leurs désordres ont outragés, les repoussent avec horreur.

Quel est donc l'asile qui pourrait leur rester? Paris est la seule Ville qui possède un établissement public pour les filles de mauvaises mœurs. Cet établissement n'est que pour celles que la Police fait arrêter, et encore est-il insuffisant! Par-tout ailleurs il n'existe que des prisons ordinaires dans lesquelles, bien loin de se corriger, elles ne font qu'accroître la Corruption. On doit d'ailleurs, tout en réprimant leurs désordres, tenter de les ramener à de meilleurs mœurs.

L'Expérience a appris que l'institution des Sœurs du Refuge est la seule qui puisse assurer du succès pour guérir, ou au moins, diminuer une pareille playe. C'est par leur patience à toute épreuve, par la distribution des travaux variés selon les dispositions, et sur-tout par le Respect que leurs Vertus inspirent, que les sœurs du refuge parviennent à ramener un grand nombre de ces filles à la Vertu.

On peut également compter parmi les causes qui concourent puissamment à l'efficacité des soins des sœurs du refuge, l'exemple qu'offrent dans leurs maisons les conversions commencées et le zèle qu'elles mettent à procurer l'établissement de celles de ces filles qui sont déjà converties.

Outre les filles débauchées qui sont envoyées par la Police, et celles qui, d'elles-mêmes, chercheraient un pareil asile, le Code Napoléon a prévu le cas où des pères et mères se trouveraient dans la nécessité de provoquer contre leurs enfans une détention plus ou moins longue. Ce n'est point dans une prison, avec des criminels, qu'on peut confondre une jeune personne dont les écarts ne sont peut-être que les suites de l'inexpérience ou d'une séduction passagère. Un père, pour corriger sa fille, ne voudrait point la couvrir d'un opprobre ineffaçable qui pourrait rejaillir sur lui-même, quelque fût d'ailleurs le degré de son mécontentement.

Le projet de Décret ci-joint que je sou mets aujourd'hui à l'approbation de Votre Majesté, est celui même qui a été adopté par la Section de l'Intérieur de Son Conseil d'Etat, à la suite de la discussion du projet de Son petit Conseil réuni en 1808 excepté cependant l'article suivant:

"Toutes les fois qu'une personne étant dans leur maison, voudra "adresser une Pétition au Procureur Général ou Impérial, ou au Préfet, la "Supérieur sera tenue de laisser passer librement cette Petition, et de "veiller à ce qu'elle soit envoyée à son adresse."

J'ai cru devoir supprimer cette disposition comme inutile.

À la vérité cette disposition est extraite du Décret du 30 7bre 1807, mais il n'est point venu à ma connaissance jusqu'à présent, qu'aucune détenue se soit trouvée dans le cas d'user de cette faculté.

D'ailleurs, la transmission de Pétition dont il s'agit ne peut convenir les filles qui, étant entrées volontairement dans les maisons, restent toujours libres d'en sortir.

À l'égard de celles qui sont envoyées par la Police, il est d'usage que ses agens s'occupent de vérifier par eux-mêmes comment elles se conduisent, et dès lors, elles seront dans le cas de porter leurs plaintes.

À plus forte raison, ce soin est-il pris par les parens qui ont le malheur d'être obligés de renfermer ainsi leurs enfans, et qui n'ont d'autre désir que de voir cesser le besoin d'user de cette rigueur.

Je suis avec un profond Respect,

Sire, (etc) Bigor de Préménen

Table

*au Palais des
Liberés, le 26
Novembre 1810.*

CONSEIL D'ÉTAT.

EXTRAIT DU REGISTRE DES DÉLIBÉRATIONS.

Séance du *Vingt-huit Novembre* 1810.

Approuvé

PROJET DE DÉCRET

Relatif aux Congrégations des Sœurs du Refuge.

[Signature]

NAPOLÉON, EMPEREUR DES FRANÇAIS,
ROI D'ITALIE, et PROTECTEUR DE LA CONFÉDÉ-
RATION DU RHIN;

Sur le rapport de notre ministre des cultes;
Notre Conseil d'état entendu,

Nous AVONS DÉCRÉTÉ et DÉCRÉTONS ce qui suit:

SECTION I.^{re}

Dispositions générales.

*Exp. le 7 Janv.
aux M.M.
Des Cultes
De la Just.
et De l'Intérieur*

ART. 1.^{er} Les maisons dites *du Refuge*, destinées à
ramener aux bonnes mœurs les filles qui se sont mal con-
duites, seront, comme les maisons hospitalières de femmes,
placées sous la protection de Madame, notre chère et au-
guste mère.

Les statuts de la maison de Paris, joints au présent décret,
sont approuvés et reconnus.

2. Les statuts de chaque maison séparée ou des maisons
qui voudraient être affiliées à celle de Paris, seront approu-
vés par nous, et insérés au Bulletin des lois, pour être re-
connus et avoir force d'institution publique, d'après un rap-
port séparé.

3. Toute maison des sœurs du Refuge dont les statuts
n'auront pas été approuvés et publiés avant le 1.^{er} juillet
1811, sera dissoute.

4. Les congrégations ou maisons du Refuge se
conformeront, pour les noviciats et les vœux, ainsi que
pour les revenus, biens et donations, aux dispositions
des II.^e et III.^e sections du règlement du 18 février 1809,
concernant les congrégations hospitalières.

5. Il sera pourvu aux besoins des maisons actuelle-



ment existantes ; il ne pourra être tenu, dans les maisons du Refuge, de pensionnat pour l'éducation des enfans, s'il n'a été donné par nous, à cet égard, une autorisation spéciale, d'après l'organisation des établissemens pour l'éducation des personnes du sexe, sur lesquels il sera statué successivement par nous.

6. Lorsqu'une commune voudra établir une maison du Refuge, la demande en sera transmise par le préfet, avec son avis, au ministre des cultes, qui soumettra l'établissement des nouvelles maisons à notre approbation.

SECTION II.

Discipline.

7. Les sœurs du Refuge ne pourront recevoir dans leurs maisons que des personnes qui y entreraient volontairement, ~~celles qui seraient soumises à l'autorité de la police, ou celles qui y seraient envoyées par les pères ou conseils de famille, dans les formes établies par le Code Napoléon.~~ *Dont il est parlé dans l'art. 12.*

8. Il sera tenu, par la supérieure, des registres séparés, l'un pour les personnes envoyées par les familles, et l'autre pour les personnes envoyées par la police : ces registres contiendront les noms, prénoms, âge et domicile de ces personnes, la date de leur entrée, celle de leur sortie ; les noms, prénoms et domicile des magistrats et des parens qui les y auront fait placer.

9. Le fonctionnaire public ou les parens par l'autorité desquels une fille sera dans une de ces maisons, seront toujours admis à lui parler et à exiger qu'elle leur soit représentée.

10. Seront les maisons du Refuge, comme toutes les autres maisons de l'État, soumises à la police des maires, des préfets et officiers de justice.

11. Les sœurs du Refuge seront assujéties aux autres règles de discipline prescrites pour les sœurs hospitalières.

12. Les sœurs du Refuge ne pourront recevoir dans leurs maisons que les personnes soumises à l'autorité de la police, et qui y seront envoyées par ses ordres, ou qui seront envoyées par les pères ou conseils de famille, dans les formes établies par le Code Napoléon. Toutes

les fois qu'une personne qui sera dans la maison, voudra adresser une pétition à l'autorité administrative ou judiciaire, la supérieure sera tenue de laisser passer librement ladite pétition sans en prendre connaissance, et même de tenir la main à ce qu'elle soit envoyée à son adresse.

13. Le sous-préfet, ou à son défaut le maire, d'une part, et notre procureur impérial près le tribunal civil, ou son substitut, de l'autre, seront tenus de faire, chacun tous les trois mois, une visite dans les maisons des dames du Refuge, de se faire représenter les registres, d'entendre même en particulier, si elles le demandent, toutes les personnes qui y sont, de recevoir les réclamations, et de veiller à ce qu'il y soit fait droit, conformément aux lois; sans préjudice des visites que pourront faire tous nos procureurs généraux, toutes les fois qu'ils le jugeront convenable.

Les procès-verbaux de ces visites seront envoyés, par ceux qui les auront faites, à notre grand-juge ministre de la justice.

14. Nos ministres sont chargés, chacun en ce qui le concerne, de l'exécution du présent décret.

*Le Conseil d'Etat a vu et a
discuté le projet de loi, l'adopté;
Sous le sceau conforme
Le Secrétaire Général du Conseil d'Etat*

M. G. Duvivier



Appendices to Chapter VII.

Three oral testimonies

1. The nun - Sister St Dominique of the Miséricorde de Laval

The sister was 83 years old in 1985, the year in which her evidence was taken down by the author. She was still an extremely intelligent woman who had lived in the refuge for 44 years, having entered in 1941.

"There was a great spirit of prayer among the girls; I was very impressed. The sound of their voices in the chapel where I had gone to take part in a retreat made such an impression on me that I decided to sacrifice my scholastic career in order to become a sister of the Miséricorde..Each ancienne was flanked by two newer girls..Many girls voluntarily spent hours in chapel each Sunday, their day off. They had each a little garden. They could not go out during my first years...liberty came at about 1950. The girls were not used to the rhythm of life in the world outside. The hours of work were short - interrupted often - very calm, interspersed with prayers - quite different from the life they would find outside. That's why they were often dismissed or ran away from jobs..The world was presented as perdition. There was a tradition to give them a sum of money and a set of clothes when they left. They were not encouraged to go. "The girls of the Miséricorde", it was said in a tone of contempt in my youth. People thought of the girls as tarts. No-one saw them and so did not know them...

Who has supported the Miséricorde? The bourgeoisie and the noblesse.. They got rid of the girls that worried them and did a good work at the same time. They were not officially prostitutes but were what people called filles de mauvaise vie . I found a very family spirit....the only family that the girls had....Girls who stayed on - they were put so much on their guard regarding the life outside. "How will you bear it, have you thought very carefully?" etc....They were happy, they had a life among themselves. Everything was grouped around the "mother" of each group (of which there were six) who was aided by two other sisters and two anciennes.. These surveillantes acted as intermediaries between the nuns and the girls. I always found them well accepted and very kind. They supervised the dormitories at night."

2. A girl who stayed - Mlle Marie-Gilberte, ancienne of the Miséricorde de Laval. Very alert; in charge of the reception desk.

Mlle Gilberte was 81 at the time of the interview, having entered the refuge in 1917 when she was 13 years old. Some time earlier she had lost her mother and father in the space of three months. "I went as a servant in a big boarding house but it was too much for me. Within the refuge I was taught all kinds of sewing. I didn't like it but was glad later on and proud to be able to do all kinds of work. With the anciennes I was treated exactly as if I were their sister. I felt comforted by the esprit de famille. Nothing was ever said about my own family circumstances; this was a great comfort too. Only the "mothers" - those in charge of the classes - that is, only six women, knew about me. They gave religious instruction too and one could talk to them and only to them about the problems of one's family and past. Recreation - skipping, skittles, lots of singing - all kinds of songs. Me, I'll sing anything; I don't care what it is. My childhood was happy once the forgiveness for faults was given. No further mention was made. The house was very poor; only our work provided money. I learnt to make shirts. No formal education - no newspapers, no radio until after World War II, and then only one radio for the whole refuge. We never went out, except to St Joseph des Champs (a subsidiary of the Miséricorde) for an outing two or three times a year. We went twelve at a time. All our older girls had the souls of children. Some of them were fifty years old. They undertook mortifications, so as to make the Lord happy and to help someone in need."

Mlle Gilberte said several times that she loved to live at the Miséricorde; if they had forced her to leave it would have killed her. "We were upheld by the virtues of the older girls - their life of prayer and forgetfulness of themselves. We knew the nuns lived in the same conditions of poverty as ourselves. They wore dresses which had been

darned many times. If you had seen their dresses! The older girls never hit me, neither did the sisters." Nowadays the girls are allowed to talk to each other about what they have done, etc., before coming to the Miséricorde, which is partly supported by the state, but Mlle Gilberte believed that this was a disadvantage to them. She would prefer, in their place, to have the past left in silence. "My name...they explained that my own name (Marie-Louise) was common in the house and that, as no family names were ever spoken, everyone needed a different name, so I was given Marie-Gilberte. Didn't mind a bit. My family asked me if I wanted to leave but I decided to stay. Only my godmother got angry. The sisters told me of the letter that woman sent, but did not give it to me." She was glad not to have had it.

3. A girl who left - Mme Janine Moulines (née Petit) Thin, small, aged 63. Voluntary worker at the church of St Germain, Paris.

Mme Moulines was put into a refuge at Le Mans, run by the White Sisters, at four years old by her mother who was married to an alcoholic. She stayed 16 years before being transferred to the Bon Pasteur d'Angers. Le Mans is independent of Angers and under the control of the bishop. "It was like a concentration camp there...I never felt a drop of hot water on my skin until I got to Angers. Work at Le Mans was boring, hard, confined to sewing or making lace at 40 cm the hour. There was no real education. The Bon Pasteur d'Angers was like paradise in comparison. I received more education and was trained in several skills connected with sewing so that I was able to earn my living when I left at 24. I ran a little mending business for one of the big shops. Seeing that I was very pious, the nuns had expected me to join the order of St Magdalen [severe contemplative discipline of nuns recruited from penitents inside the convent] but I wanted to be a missionary and was encouraged to do so by a priest who visited the convent. The nuns would not hear of it and stopped the priest's visits. On an evening in November 1946 they told me: 'The cloister or the door!' During the grand silence that night I thought it over and in the morning they beckoned to me and said 'Your reply?' I chose the door. They gave me money for my train fare to Paris and a few extra coins and a few clothes. I spent the night in the waiting room of the Gare de Montparnasse, terrified. I was spotted by a priest who had a mission to care for young girls alone in Paris. [It was the abbé Talvas of Le Nid, a well-known work of charity by now.] He took me to a boarding house run by the J.O.C. [Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne - Young Workers' Christian Movement] and from there to a centre run by Le Nid in the country, where a doctor cared for me. I then began to have periods for the first time, at 24."

Mme Moulines had an unhappy marriage; she brought up her children with some of the severity that she had experienced, she realises. She is a practising Catholic but her children have all rejected the Church, although they lead good lives. Even now the events of her past move her greatly. Her mother was still alive at the time of the interview but the children of this mother's second marriage had told Mme Moulines that the old lady did not wish ever to see her daughter. The nuns of the Bon Pasteur d'Angers which she came to know during her four years' residence were the nearest thing she had to an extended family. "They helped me when I was destitute at the time of my separation from my husband and I still write to one of the sisters. I know that my early life has marked me indelibly. It made me nervous like a little skinned rabbit. Even now I never go to a café or a cinema alone."



MADAME DE COMBE
 Première Supérieure des filles du Bon Pasteur
 Renonçant à l'erreur pour embrasser la foy
 Elle fut de Jesus la disciple fidelle.
 Et sous ce bon Pasteur qui la remplit de zele
 L'aseule charité fut son unique loy.



Inveni drachmam quam perdideram. Luc 15.

RÉLATION ABREGÉE
 DE LA VIE
 DE MADAME
 DE COMBÉ
 INSTITUTRICE



DE LA MAISON, DU BON PASTEUR.

MADAME DE COMBÉ na-
 quit à Leyde l'an 1656.
 Elle reçut le nom de
 Marie au Baptême. De
 Cyz étoit le nom de sa famille.
 Son aïeul, gentilhomme Hol-
 landois, s'étoit distingué dans les
 guerres des Pays-bas. Son pere
 Jean de Cyz n'ayant pas assez de
 bien pour soutenir sa condition

A



LA BONNE MÈRE

Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte DE LAMOUROUS

Fondatrice de la Maison de LA MISÉRICORDE



La Rév. Mère THÉRÈSE



Painting

*Maries de l'Assomption
S. O. S. B.*



Photograph



Bonne Mère CHUPIN

O Seigneur mon Dieu, mon Divin Époux, suppléez vous-même à ce qui me manque. ! Votre Cœur est si sensible à l'infirmité qui cherche en vous son appui. Compatissez à ma faiblesse. Vous restez chargé de tout ce qui échappe à la puissance que vous m'avez mesurée. ! Plus grande, j'aurais agi plus largement, mais je ne me plains pas que vous m'ayez faite si petite, au contraire. Cette petitesse me garde et m'avertit à tout moment d'avoir recours à vous en tout ce qui me surpasse.

Prière de Bonne Mère.

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