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Vincent de Paul: The Making of a Catholic *Dévo*t

Alison Forrestal

In late 1608, Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) travelled to Paris, a city in which he had previously spent little or no time. On his arrival, he lodged initially in a small apartment in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, from where he began to establish contact with prominent representatives of the *Dévo*t reform movement that had redesigned the sacred landscape of Paris since the 1590s.¹ Within less than a decade, he was poised to draw on the experiences of the *Dévo*t apprenticeship that he served in Paris between 1608 and 1617. While serving as parish priest in Châtillon-les-Dombes near Lyon during 1617, de Paul established a lay female confraternity of charity to assist the sick poor of the locality ‘spiritually and corporally’.² This provided the template for those that the Congregation of the Mission, the community of priests and brothers that he formed in 1625, sponsored during its missionary campaigns in provincial parishes in France, Italy and Poland. It was also the first step towards the establishment of a confraternal community of unmarried women, the Daughters of Charity, by de Paul and Louise de Marillac in 1633, to assist the sick poor.³ By the time that de Paul died in September 1660, the Congregation had 21 houses devoted to its French mission, while the Daughters, in addition to bases in most Parisian parishes, possessed 42 establishments. Parochial branches of the confraternity of charity functioned in every area in which the Congregation and the Daughters operated. De Paul presided over a substantial network of missions and charitable enterprises through France, but especially prevalent in the north, west and south of the realm, and in the hinterlands of Warsaw, Turin, Genoa and Rome. He became a leading exponent of the missionary ethos that characterised the Catholic Reformation, and was canonised in 1737 for his exceptional skill in devising organisational structures, didactic strategies and spiritual principles that promoted it.

When later recounting the events surrounding the foundation of the first confraternity that precipitated these developments, de Paul used it a means of instructing his associates on the benevolent omnipotence of divine providence. As a foundational episode of such spiritual

I would like to thank Paul Henzmann C. M., Bernard Koch C. M., Claude Lautissier C. M., and Joseph Bergin for assistance in the preparation of this essay.

¹ L. Abelly, *La Vie du venerable servant de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, 2 vols (Paris: Florentin Lambert, 1664), i, p. 21.

² I have used a facsimile of the original manuscript rule, because the published transcription of the text contains some errors: Archives de la Congrégation de la Mission, Paris (ACMP), ‘Second Règlement de la Charité de Femmes de Châtillon les Dombes’, f. 1r.

significance, the Châtillon experience has contributed hugely to the hagiographic cult of de Paul as the apostle of charity progressively attuned to the signals of the divine will.⁴ However, explored from fresh perspectives, the key events leading up to and inaugurating the confraternity in the parish are the outcome of de Paul's exposure to *Dévo*t currents in Paris, and provide unparalleled insights into the combination of influences that inspired his first major intervention in the evangelising mission of the Catholic Reformation.

Underpinning the first confraternity lay a tapestry of relationships that the future *Dévo*t and leader of the French Catholic Reformation weaved between 1608 and 1617. De Paul possessed remarkable ability to plunder the intellectual resources and organisational conventions that he encountered in the *Dévo*t milieu of Paris in order to create new pious enterprises. Of these, the constellation of the *haute noblesse* Gondi family, the eminent Oratorian founder Pierre de Bérulle, and the Spanish religious order, the *Frères de la Charité* provided de Paul with a range of key resources that directed him towards Châtillon and enabled him to establish his first confraternity. They form three interdependent subsets within the *Dévo*t movement, those of the wealthy lay activist, the clerical reformer and the new religious order; de Paul's reliance on them in formulating his contributions to Catholic rehabilitation demonstrates the potency of the ideas and practices transmitted within this environment, and offers an instructive example of his ability to nurture and exploit patronage in the immediate and long terms. From these vantage points, the parish and confraternity of Châtillon form a microcosm characterised by key features of Catholic resurgence in France.

The parish of Châtillon, in which de Paul arrived in late April 1617, was not de Paul's first parochial cure.⁵ He had already acted as parish priest of Clichy in northeast Paris in 1612, and resigned the cure only in 1626, claiming an annual pension of 100 livres for four years.⁶ Before moving to Clichy, he acted as almoner in the household of Marguerite de Navarre in 1610 and 1611. Soon after he left Clichy in September 1613, he became preceptor to the children of the Gondi family and confessor to their mother Marguerite de Silly. He also held other benefices

³ S. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France. The Early History of the Daughters of Charity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁴ Vincent de Paul. *Correspondance, Conférences, Entretiens*, P. Coste (ed.), 14 vols (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1920), ix, pp. 208, 243.

⁵ De Paul's first biographer, Louis Abelly, stated that de Paul arrived in Châtillon in July, but this does not accord with the documentary record of de Paul's activities in the parish: Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 37; Archives départementales (AD) du Rhône, 4 G 121, ancien registre 81, f. 93r-v.

during these years. In May 1610, he received the abbey of Saint-Léonard de Chaumes in Saints from the archbishop of Aix, Paul Hurault de l'Hôpital.⁷ In February 1614, he became *curé* of Gamaches parish in Rouen diocese, though he does not seem to have taken possession of the post.⁸ Gamaches lay close to de Paul's final acquisition; he became treasurer and canon in the collegiate chapter of Écouis in May 1615, though he only visited Écouis once, to the chagrin of the chapter.⁹

De Paul owed the benefices of Gamaches and Écouis to Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, who, as baron Du Plessis, possessed rights of presentation to them.¹⁰ He acted as preceptor and confessor to members of Gondi's family for four years before travelling to Châtillon and returned to them once more in February 1618. The Gondi family proved to be among de Paul's earliest and staunchest patrons and, as their client, he retained unshakable loyalty to them. This became most famously evident when the Roman community of the Congregation, established in 1639, offered hospitality to the disgraced son of Philippe-Emmanuel, Cardinal de Retz, in 1654. In a conference with Congregation members in 1655, de Paul justified this flouting of the crown's wishes by arguing that it had enabled them to demonstrate 'great gratitude' to Monsieur de Gondi, their founder, and his son, their prelate.¹¹ In April 1625, Philippe-Emmanuel and Marguerite de Gondi guaranteed de Paul's incipient Congregation a capital sum of 45,000 livres, the income from which was to be devoted to maintaining at least six priests who would perform missions every five years on the rural Gondi lands and amongst galley convicts.¹² Two years later, the foundation contract was modified, so that, excepting the plan for missions on their lands, the Gondi family agreed to withdraw all contractual clauses that had ascribed them any power over the Congregation's missions as well as over 'the manner of life' of its members.¹³ From 1624, the

⁶ De Paul's appointment to Tilh in Dax, in 1600, had been successfully contested: *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, pp. 7, 17–18. On Clichy, see *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷ De Paul resigned the abbey in 1616, after six years of legal challenges to his possession: *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, pp. 8–13, 37–9; AD de Charente Maritime: Série B 1340, ff. 66r, 221v, 264v–5v; Série B 1522, ff. 104r, 111r; Série 3 E 1173, f. 466r–v; Série 3 E 1203, ff. 229r–30v.

⁸ AD de Seine-Maritime, G. 9574, ff. 77v–8r. A note on the act of nomination suggests that the nomination was not honoured.

⁹ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, pp. 9–24.

¹⁰ A. Vautier, 'Saint Vincent de Paul chanoine d'Écouis', *Petites Annales de St. Vincent de Paul*, 48 (1903), 356–64.

¹¹ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xi, p. 172.

¹² In 1619, Gondi, as general of the galleys of France, had recommended that the king appoint de Paul chaplain general of the galleys, with an annual salary of 600 livres: Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 80; Bibliothèque Nationale (BN), MS Fr. 26202; *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, pp. 197–202.

¹³ Archives Nationale (AN), ET/lxxviii/225 (17 April 1627).

embryonic community resided at the former university college, Bons-Enfants, provided by Jean-François de Gondi, brother to Philippe-Emmanuel and archbishop of Paris.¹⁴

The generosity of their donation in 1625 tends to overshadow the other substantial benefits that his link with the Gondi couple gave to de Paul. They provided a perfect point of entry to a wider pool of benefactors within their family and household, in addition to their own perennial concern that they use their resources to sponsor de Paul's works of evangelisation and charity. As early as 1619, Madame de Gondi bequeathed de Paul 2,400 livres.¹⁵ She earmarked a further 1,800 livres 'partly for the sick poor of the Association of Charity that is or will be established' on Gondi estates in Picardy, Champagne and Montmirail, and partly to finance annual missions by the Jesuits or Oratorians. From early 1618, the Gondi estates formed the map on which de Paul plotted the geographical base for the early confraternities of charity and Madame de Gondi provided Trojan aid to de Paul as he established confraternities of charity on her estates.¹⁶ Her status meant that her patronage was an invaluable asset to recruitment, and de Paul even credited her with inspiring his initial efforts to improve rural piety through preaching and sacramental administration on her lands from 1614.

Widower Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi joined the Oratory in 1627, but enhanced his involvement in de Paul's burgeoning enterprises. In 1632, he acted as guarantor for the Congregation when Adrien Le Bon donated the priory of Saint-Lazare to it.¹⁷ Gondi continued to monitor and assist de Paul and de Marillac in nurturing confraternal foundations on his lands until his death in 1662, resolving local disputes, providing provisions and financial reimbursement to confraternal members.¹⁸ In addition, de Paul regularly approached him for counsel on strategic decisions important to the Congregation's expansion, such as the plea in 1644 of the inhabitants of Montmirail that the Congregation should continue to maintain their presence in the town. Gondi energetically endorsed their appeal, and had recently encouraged de Paul to accept the *Hôtel-Dieu de la Chaussée* that his son, the duc de Retz, presented to fund the undertaking; the contract noted

¹⁴ AN, M105.

¹⁵ 'Testament de Madame de Gondi', *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 98, no. 1 (1933), 65–80.

¹⁶ In Villepreux, Joigny, Montmirail, Folleville, Sérévillers and Paillart, with the exception of Villepreux, copies of the rules are in ACMP. The rules printed in *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, are incomplete.

¹⁷ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, pp. 234–44; Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 624, ff. 435, 440.

¹⁸ See, for example: *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), i, pp. 84–5, 95–9 and 126–7 (de Paul to Louise de Marillac, May 1630, 7 December 1630, and 15 September 1631).

the duc's wish to contribute to the 'good work' founded by his parents.¹⁹ In the same year, the duc's secretary, Louis Toutblanc, bequeathed two nearby farms, in Fontaine-Essart and Vieux-Moulins, to the Congregation, indicating the enduring power of the Gondi circle to introduce de Paul to new champions.²⁰

Madame de Gondi's brother-in-law, Charles d'Angennes, comte de Rochepot, joined the Congregation in late 1647 and died at Saint-Lazare in late December 1648.²¹ But a sustained association of at least three decades is readily evident in the handsome patronage offered by Monsieur de Gondi's sister, the pious widow, Claude-Marguerite de Gondi, marquise de Maignelay. Congregation priests established confraternities on her lands in Picardy when performing missions from the 1620s. In 1640, the marquise reported to de Paul from Nanteuil-le-Haudouin that he should send additional booklets on establishing the confraternity to her because she, with the co-operation of local *curés*, was 'trying in our villages to revive this devotion, which the war has somewhat brought to a halt. People remember well, and rightly so, all the acts of charity your priests did there so effectively.'²² She participated fully in the charitable aid administered by the confraternity in Nanteuil, until her declining health prevented her from carrying out the home visits required of its members.²³ She also successfully urged de Paul and Louise de Marillac to send the *Filles de la Charité* to the town in 1641 where they ran a small school for girls and provided welfare.²⁴ Shortly before she died in 1650, she procured them for the parish of Saint-Roch in Paris, where she resided; a member of its confraternity of charity, she bestowed 1,000 livres to it in her will 'to meet [the needs] of the poor sick'.²⁵

The marquise also bequeathed the sizeable capital sum of 18,000 livres to the Congregation, stipulating that its annual income of 1,000 livres should pay for the maintenance of ordinands attending the conferences that de Paul had begun at Saint-Lazare under the instruction of her brother the archbishop of Paris in 1631. This was simply the final gift to a cause that she

¹⁹ AN, S6708; *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), ii, pp. 495–7 (de Paul to Guillaume Delville, 20 November 1644).

²⁰ AN, S6708.

²¹ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), iii, pp. 396–9 (de Paul to Étienne Blatiron, 25 December 1648); *Ibid.*, vii, pp. 289–91 (de Paul to Jacques Pesnelle, 15 October 1658).

²² *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), ii, pp. 93–4 (Marquise de Maignelay to de Paul, 21 August 1640).

²³ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), ii, pp. 94–5 (Marquise de Maignelay to de Paul, 26 August 1640).

²⁴ *Sainte Louise de Marillac. Écrits*, É. Charpy (ed.) (Paris: Compagnie des Filles de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul, 1983), L. 69 (Louise de Marillac to de Paul, August 1642).

²⁵ BN, MS Clairambault 1136, 'Testament de la Marquise de Maignelay', p. 8.

had financed since the early 1630s.²⁶ It would undoubtedly have proved welcome; to feed and lodge an ordinand on retreat in Paris normally cost the Congregation approximately twenty sous per day in the 1640s, but it charged ordinands, the number of whom averaged around eight-five at any given conference, only one-third of this cost.²⁷ In fact, de Paul redirected this legacy in 1651, exchanging it for 175 *arpents* of land at Plessis-Trappes, which he bought from the administrators of the *Hôpital des Incurables*. He carefully specified in the contract that the farm's revenue was to be used to maintain the ordinands, thus ensuring that he acquiesced to the wishes of his benefactor.²⁸

De Paul's employment in the Gondi household permitted him to forge close friendships with a number of staff who collaborated with him as he extended his network of evangelisation and placed the Congregation on a sound material footing. While an inbuilt hierarchy governed de Paul's role as a Gondi client, the friendships that he cultivated with these individuals meant that he was free to treat them as equals. Monsieur Belin, chaplain at the Gondi *château* in Villepreux, and Charles Du Fresne, secretary and later *intendant* to the Gondis, reciprocated the emotional attachment that de Paul frequently expressed for them in the efforts that each made to promote his organisations and missions through advice, management and negotiations at local levels, and recruitment. Once de Paul established a confraternity of charity in Villepreux in February 1618 Belin acted as a monitor of its conduct and local conditions.²⁹ While in Paris, he spent some time ministering to the galley prisoners with Antoine Portail, and participated in missions carried out in the Paris basin in 1625. Although he decided not to join the Congregation, he contributed to its evangelical activities throughout the later 1620s and 1630s, circuiting the area around Villepreux to teach catechism on de Paul's request, for example, in Saint-Nom-La-Bretèche and Les Clays in 1634. In 1630, he temporarily taught young girls in Villepreux while de Paul and de Marillac organised a suitable female teacher. De Paul reminded him stirringly of his *ex officio* status as a Congregation member when he told him that 'Are you really unaware that Our Lord has made you

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14; AN, M211; *Oraison funebre de haute et puissante dame Charlotte Marguerite De Gondy, Marquise de Maignelay. Prononcée en la presence de Monseigneur l'Archevesque de Corinthe, Coadjuteur de Paris, celebrant Pontificalement dans l'Eglise des Prestres de l'Oratoire de Jesus* (Paris: n. p., 1651), pp. 53–5.

²⁷ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), ii, pp. 74–81 (de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 26 July 1640); *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 232–3 (de Paul to Jean-François de Gondi, 3 September 1647); *Ibid.*, iv, pp. 252–3 (de Paul to Jean Martin, 15 September 1651); *Ibid.*, iv, pp. 340–3 (de Paul to Lambert aux Couteaux, 22 March 1652); *Ibid.*, v, pp. 587–9 (de Paul to Charles Ozenne, April 1656).

²⁸ AN, S6681A.

²⁹ Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 47.

a Missionary when it is you who have one of the greatest shares in the conception, gestation, birth and development of the Mission, and that, were it not for the clear signs God has given that He wanted you in Villepreux, you would belong to the Mission completely?’³⁰

Both Belin and Du Fresne proved constantly alert to attracting new members to de Paul’s associations.³¹ During their forty-five year relationship, Du Fresne introduced de Paul to his mother and sister, Isabelle, who joined the *Dames de la Charité* at the *Hôtel-Dieu*.³² De Paul unsuccessfully resisted his monetary gifts to the de Paul family, while willingly applying his acumen in managing Gondi assets to transactions made on behalf of the Congregation. Of outstanding merit was the role that Du Fresne played when the Congregation, in a series of choreographed deals, gathered large tracts of land in Orsigny, which served as the main source of agricultural produce for Saint-Lazare. In November 1645, Du Fresne acted as the intermediary or agent in the purchase of 81 *arpents*, plus buildings, from Bernard Dupuis and Nicole Mallart. In early December, Edme Ranier, secretary to the Prince de Condé, assumed an identical role in the transfer of 44 *arpents* from these venders. It is not clear why the Congregation needed to use both men as fronts for its acquisition of the land, but, as their advocate, Du Fresne risked substantial personal losses by advancing 17,635 livres in order to ensure that the transfers were completed and he steered both deals to fruition for the Congregation.³³

By 1617, de Paul had also built a reservoir of lucrative goodwill through another of his patrons, Pierre de Bérulle. The Oratorian founder acted as de Paul’s spiritual director to at least 1617, after meeting him around 1610. This relation led de Paul into the ambit of the Gondi family; Bérulle acted as the spiritual director of the marquise de Maignelay until the early 1620s and she, her brother and his wife financed the foundation of the Oratory.³⁴ Abelly claimed that de Paul lived with Bérulle’s community for two years, but his name does not appear on the list of the Oratory’s founding members from 11 November 1611 and he remained officially resident at rue de la Seine until 7 December 1612. He may have stayed for short periods at the Oratory’s house, La Petit Bourbon, but visited Bérulle there regularly. In later years, de Paul certainly proved

³⁰ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), i, pp. 122–5, 128–9 (de Paul to Louise de Marillac, 13 September 1631, 22/3 September 1631); *Ibid.*, i, pp. 287–8 (de Paul to Belin, 16 December 1634).

³¹ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 449–51 (de Paul to Antoine Lucas, 21 February 1638); *Ibid.*, viii, p. 329 (Charles Du Fresne to de Paul, 25 July 1660).

³² ACMP, MS ‘Noms des premières Dames de la Charité 1634–1660’ (unpaginated). I am grateful to Barbara Diefendorf for supplying a photocopy of this manuscript.

³³ ACMP, ‘Transaction avec le seigneur de Limours, 25 Juin 1650’ (copy); AN, S8885; AN, S6687.

³⁴ *Oraison funebre...Maignelay*, p. 47.

conversant with the early routines of the community, borrowed expressly from the teachings that Bérulle had delivered to his associates between 1611 and 1615, and although he preserved more monastic norms in his organisation of congregational life, he included some devotional practices characteristic of the Oratory.³⁵

In 1611, when François Bourgoing resigned as *curé* of Clichy to join the fledgling Oratory, Bérulle suggested that de Paul succeed him. Through this intervention, Paul invested in a connection with a second prominent *Dévo*t family, the Hennequins. Aléxandre Hennequin (d1623), seigneur of Clichy, was reared under the guardianship of his maternal grandparents, the Du Breuil, and the tutelage of either Michel or Louis de Marillac and Nicolas Hennequin de Vincy, seigneur Du Fey and Villecien, after his father Pierre was assassinated with Henri III in 1589. Three of de Paul's early and most committed collaborators emerged from this extended family: Louise de Marillac, the daughter of Louis de Marillac; the children of Nicolas Hennequin de Vincy, Antoine, seigneur de Villecien, and Isabelle Hennequin Du Fey.³⁶ In the 1630s, their cousin, Madame *la présidente* de Brou, was a *Dame* at the *Hôtel-Dieu* and president of the confraternity in Nogent, while she financed the establishment of the *Filles* in Bernay in 1654. Mademoiselle de Brou, perhaps her relative, was the treasurer of the confraternity in Saint-Barthélemy parish.³⁷ The Hennequin siblings liberally provided resources from, at least the early 1620s for de Paul's work. Until her death around 1635, Du Fay regularly funded refurbishments at the Congregation's accommodation in Paris, donated money to de Paul's missions and confraternities and supplied large quantities of pictures and beads for his priests to distribute on missions. She and her mother were *Dames* at the *Hôtel-Dieu* and, crucially for the consolidation of the confraternal network, she acted as a *procurresse-générale* for the confraternities in the *Île de France*.³⁸ Before her brother entered the Congregation of the Mission in July 1645, he employed its missionaries on his estate in Villecien, and advised the confraternity in the Parisian parish of

³⁵ For example, *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xii, p. 45; G. Habert, *La Vie du Cardinal de Berulle instituteur et premier Supérieur General de la Congregation de l'Oratoire de Jesus-Christ nostre Seigneur* (Paris: J Camusat and P. LePetit, 1646), p. 330.

³⁶ J. Leviste, *Les Château du Fey et la seigneurie de Villecien depuis le XVI^e siècle* (Villeneuve-sur-Yonne: Amis du Vieux Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, 1990), p. 9.

³⁷ ACMP, MS 'Noms'; *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), i, pp. 280, 494–5 (de Paul to Louise de Marillac, post-1631, 1638). On Bernay, see P. Coste, *Le Grand Saint du grand siècle*, 3 vols (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1931), i, p. 449.

³⁸ ACMP, MS 'Noms'. See *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), i, for letters between de Paul and Du Fay.

Saint-Laurent. In June 1645, he donated 11,700 livres to the Congregation, less an annual pension of 585 livres.³⁹

Abelly also credited Bérulle with a part in the arrival of de Paul in Châtillon in 1617. On this episode, however, he and later biographers have constructed a rather simplistic narrative that presents de Paul's move to the parish as an escape from his confessee, Madame de Gondi. In reality, as Barbara Diefendorf remarks perceptively, when Madame de Gondi claimed that she 'feared losing [de Paul's] assistance' she was driven by her realization that she would find it difficult, if not impossible, to replicate the excellent relationship of trust that she had built up with her confessor of four years. Just as crucially, she worried that, without him, her own salvation, that of her family and residents on her lands would be placed in jeopardy; for some time, she had sponsored de Paul's preaching and catechesis on her lands and had asked him to deal with 'business affairs' that involved approaching a religious community to perform missions. In fact, Madame's husband had already expressed a similar worry and had requested that she write to de Paul.⁴⁰

Bérulle's lacklustre effort to persuade de Paul to return to Paris is usually taken to indicate that he deliberately shied of encouraging Madame de Gondi's unhealthy obsession with her confessor.⁴¹ However, when the circumstances surrounding de Paul's appointment to Châtillon are placed in complete context, it is plain that Bérulle, for his own reasons, did not have any wish for de Paul to return to the Gondi fold. The appointment was not principally the solution to an uncomfortable intimacy with Madame de Gondi. De Paul may have hankered to return to a parochial ministry for a term, but he moved to Châtillon to aid his *Dévo*t director in expanding a Congregation with which he was closely acquainted.

From 1611, Bérulle expanded the Oratory through the establishment of small communities in satellite locations. From the earliest stages of its formation, the Congregation profited from the protection of Denis de Marquement, auditor of the Rota in Rome and archbishop of Lyon between

³⁹ AN, M211; *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), i, pp. 38–9, 458–9 (de Paul to Louise de Marillac, 9 February 1628, March 1638).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 21–2 (Marguerite de Gondi to de Paul, September 1617); *Ibid.*, i, p. 23 (Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi to de Paul, 15 October 1617)—these letters are likely to have been written earlier than the dates usually assigned to them.; Abelly, *Vie*, i, pp. 38–46; B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity. Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 207.

⁴¹ Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 36.

1612 and 1626.⁴² Although not formally resident in Lyon until 9 January 1617, the Oratorians had provided services to him for several years; two Oratorians, François Bourgoing and Paul Métezeau, accompanied Marquemont on his diocesan visitation in 1614, while Bourgoing performed a preaching mission in Châtillon in mid-1616. In October, Marquemont raised the prospect of a permanent Oratorian presence in Châtillon, writing to ask Bérulle ‘to give your blessing and send some of yours to serve Our Lord there.’ He envisaged uniting the cure of Châtillon with the Congregation, and compensating the previous incumbent with a canonry in the chapter of Saint Paul in Lyon, then held by an Oratorian, Nicolas Soulfour. Marquemont suggested that the experienced Bourgoing ‘or another of his weight’ assume the posts of *curé* and superior of the Oratory house, and later that of superior in Lyon. However, Bérulle may have considered that Bourgoing was indispensable in his incarnation as an itinerant inaugurator of communities, so the man of import that he chose to represent Oratorian interests in Châtillon was Vincent de Paul.⁴³

At this stage in his career, over seven years since he had first met Bérulle, did de Paul still contemplate joining the Oratory? This is possible, although Abelly later claimed that de Paul had said that he had never intended to do so.⁴⁴ Bérulle was often stretched to find sufficient numbers of personnel to respond to calls to establish houses. He sometimes relied on individuals empathetic to the Oratory’s ethos and familiar with its habits to establish a preliminary presence in new locations.⁴⁵ He surely worried also that if he did not stamp the Oratory’s mark upon the parish, he would lose the opportunity Marquemont offered.⁴⁶ However, if the move was simply a favour to rescue Bérulle from a predicament, it is certainly indicative of de Paul’s intimacy with the Oratory and its superior at this formative point in his career. It also places a new connotation on his decision to live in community with five or six priests in the town, just as he had done in the

⁴² *Correspondance de Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle*, J. Dagens (ed.), 3 vols (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937–39), i, pp. 158–9 (Pierre de Bérulle to Nicolas Soulfour, c. October 1612).

⁴³ AD du Rhône, 1 G 48 [28], ff. 262r–8r; AD du Rhône, 19 H 1, ff. 32r–5r (Denis de Marquemont to Pierre de Bérulle, 18 October 1616). This letter has now been published, with other recently discovered correspondence, in M. Dupuy and B. Delahaye (eds), *Pierre de Bérulle. Oeuvres complètes*, 7 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1995–2006), iv, pp. 349–51, 357–8.

⁴⁴ Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 24.

⁴⁵ *Correspondance*, Dagens (ed.), i, p. 232 (Pierre de Bérulle to André Jousseau, 27 February 1617).

⁴⁶ In fact, Marquemont approved the appointment of another priest in January 1617, presumably to ensure a *curé* for the parish even if Bérulle proved unable to do so; the alternative candidate exchanged his nomination for a canonry in March: AD du Rhône, 1 G 87, ff. 256v, 279r-v.

first parish to which Bérulle had recommended him; this suggests that he immediately established a common congregational routine.⁴⁷

When de Paul arrived in Châtillon it was, contrary to hagiographical convention, in a tolerable state.⁴⁸ The episcopal visitation recorded only minor criticisms of the religious services and infrastructure, and did not refer to abuses in religious devotion.⁴⁹ Shortly before Paul's arrival, a side chapel in the town church was placed under the dutiful care of the female members of a new confraternity of the Rosary; they possessed a substantial range of linens and ornaments to decorate the chapel as well as vestments for masses held in it.⁵⁰ This necessitates a reconfiguration of the customary view of de Paul's agenda when he arrived in the parish. Instead of encountering a neglected people on the road to perdition, he found a well serviced parish and parishioners disposed towards a *curé* equipped to suggest an organisational method to assist the sick and poor, and spiritual incentives to sustain it. This explains why de Paul later celebrated the fact that he introduced the confraternity as a response to the willingness of local women to assume responsibility to alleviate hardship. Further incentive arose from the patent inability of the local Hôtel-Dieu to cater for this; just three years earlier, the episcopal visitors had observed that the hospital was in ruins, and housed only three adults and six children at the town's expense.⁵¹ De Paul's versions of the immediate events that inspired the foundation differ in detail, but he always maintained that female parishioners had been 'touched' when he recommended the sick from the pulpit and had walked to assist those in question. They proved inclined to listen when he proposed a format that would enable them 'to aid these great necessities with great ease':

I proposed to all these good persons that charity had animated...to club together, each for a day, to do the pot...it is the first place where the Charity was established.⁵²

De Paul already possessed a skilful ability to implant and inspire through emotional appeals and to suggest practical provisions to support pious desires. The confraternity was

⁴⁷ Abelly, *Vie*, i, pp. 37–8

⁴⁸ For the classic exposition of a parish in dire need of reform, see Coste, *Grand Saint*, i, p. 94.

⁴⁹ AD du Rhône, 1 G 48 [28], ff. 262r–8r.

⁵⁰ ACMP, 'Inventaire des ornements de la chapelle des dames du saint rosaire, 26 mai 1617' (copy, transcribed by Bernard Koch from the pre-1729 copy held by the *Filles de la Charité* in Châtillon).

⁵¹ AD du Rhône, 1 G 48 [28], f. 264r.

instituted on 23 August and the brief explanation of its ethos then produced metamorphosed into a complete rule when it was formally approved on 24 November 1617.⁵³ Despite the fact that this rule was the prototype, the first and most extensive piece of documentary evidence for the evolution of de Paul's charitable initiatives, it has been subjected to little analysis, regarding either its distinctive characteristics or the sources that de Paul used in composing it.⁵⁴

De Paul's choice of the confraternal structure as a framework to stimulate devotion through charity had substantial precedent within Catholic religious practice since the middle ages, and was a method of evangelisation that gained new force during the Catholic Reformation. The Jesuits proved notably adept in encouraging the development of confraternities that combined common prayer, sacramental practice, catechesis, formation of conscience and collective works of mercy.⁵⁵ In *Dévoit* Paris, pious women visited the *Hôtel-Dieu* to offer charitable assistance. Between 1611 and 1615, the widow Suzanne Habert composed a rule intended to guide their service or to describe activities that they already performed.⁵⁶ The rule does not appear to have been in use beyond 1615, but it has been suggested that de Paul might have been directly influenced by it in 1617. Certainly, a shared obligation of christocentric charity, service of Jesus through the sick poor, as well as the fact that both were intended for laywomen, links the associations and their rules.

However, de Paul did not use this rule in formulating his confraternal regulations. Firstly, the Châtillon rule did not refer to Saint Martha, who was the patroness of the *Hôtel-Dieu* association and a popular example of female sanctity articulated through action. Secondly, its structure differed to that of the *Hôtel-Dieu*, though each borrowed organisational frameworks that were common in other confraternities with female members. In Châtillon, a prioress and two assistants administered resources and organised welfare, and, unusually for female confraternal

⁵² *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, p. 203. See also *Ibid.*, xiii, pp. 208, 243.

⁵³ ACMP, 'Règlement', ff. 10v–11v.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ M. Maher, 'How the Jesuits Used Their Congregations to Promote Frequent Communion', in J. Donnelly and M. Maher (eds), *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France and Spain* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999), pp. 75–95; M. Maher, 'Confession and Consolation: The Society of Jesus and its Promotion of the General Confession', in K. Jackson Lualdi and A. Thayer (eds), *Penitence in the Age of Reformations*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 184–200.

⁵⁶ The rule is printed in H. de Coste, *Les Vies et les éloges des reines, des princesses et dames illustres*, 2 vols (Paris: Cramoisy, 1647), ii, p. 783; Diefendorf, *Penitence*, p. 229.

participants, each servant member possessed one vote in all decisions.⁵⁷ Thirdly, the women's activities in the *Hôtel-Dieu* were purely supplementary to the primary care instigated and carried out by the Augustinian nuns. Indeed, Habert was careful to warn the women to avoid upsetting or interfering with their labour and to limit their activity to cleaning wards, preparing food and offering spiritual consolation.⁵⁸ Here lay a key distinction between the rules of the associations; the women of the *Hôtel-Dieu* did not possess the proactive management and exhaustive control of care ascribed to the women in Châtillon. These routinely oversaw almost the entire spiritual and physical care of patients in their homes from the moment that the prioress placed them under their care to the moment that she recorded their death or recovery. In this confraternity, the 'circle of exclusions', meaning the restricted access of women to most positions of early modern civil, political and ecclesiastical leadership, applied only to the extent that they used a male procurator and had to alert a priest to administer the sacraments.⁵⁹

Yet, de Paul did resort to a particular manifestation of the Catholic Reformation to construct his version of charitable action: he borrowed principles of welfare from the *Frères de la Charité*. While the initial act of association in August did not refer to this order, de Paul used the interval between then and November to exercise his experiential memory in concluding that the confraternity's name and rule should derive from the order: 'The confraternity will be called the confraternity of Charity, in imitation of the hospital of Charity in Rome; and [the members] will be servants of the poor or charity.'⁶⁰ Hitherto escaping scholarly scrutiny, this pivotal sentence, when interpreted in conjunction with further details of de Paul's early career, demonstrates a creative alliance between de Paul and the hospitaler order.

The *Frères de la Charité* was one of the religious orders that best conveyed the Catholic Reformation's concern for active Christianity, was a prime expression of *Dévo*t piety in seventeenth-century France, and a beneficiary of the monarchy's ambition to re-assert its authority through support for influential representatives of Catholic reform. Originally founded by the Spaniard John of God (1495–1550) in Grenada around 1535 as a confraternity of lay brothers destined to care for the sick, the group quickly spread beyond the Iberian peninsula. After John of

⁵⁷ G. Casagrande, 'Confraternities and Lay Female Religiosity in Late Medieval and Renaissance Umbria', in *The Politics of Ritual Kinship. Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, N. Terpstra (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 48–66.

⁵⁸ ACMP, 'Règlement', ff. 2r-v, 6r-v; Coste, *Vies*, ii, p. 783.

⁵⁹ Casagrande, 'Confraternities', p. 51.

⁶⁰ ACMP, 'Règlement', f. 1r.

God's death, Pope Gregory XIII granted them the hospital of Saint John Calybita in Rome (1584), and the association began to work in Naples, Milan and Florence before arriving in France in 1601. When formally recognised as a religious order in 1596 the *Frères* became bound to the Augustinian rule and obliged to take the three solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as well as a fourth specially applicable vow of hospitality to the sick poor.⁶¹

De Paul's first biographer, Abelly, mentioned twice that he went to 'meticulously to visit, serve and exhort the poor sick of *la Charité* in the faubourg Saint-Germain' for approximately three or four years after his arrival in Paris.⁶² This accords neatly with facts known about de Paul's life in this period. He began his association with the *Frères* before he joined Marguerite's household between February and early May 1610, and knew of their work in Rome from at least one trip there before 1608.⁶³ As one of eleven almoners, de Paul had to participate in the regular almsgiving that characterised Marguerite's final years. In addition to the distribution of alms after her daily masses, she also visited and funded hospitals. One of those especially favoured was the *Hôpital de la Charité*. In visiting it, de Paul was eligible to participate in a slew of attractive papal indulgences newly awarded to the order in February 1607 to stimulate devotional charity and augment its popularity; these were offered for such virtuous acts as visiting the hospital sick, consoling and fortifying the dying, and washing of feet.

These new indulgences complimented the order's determined attempts to expand its institutional provision in Italy, Spain and France. In the latter, their installation and expansion received enthusiastic royal sponsorship. This mutually beneficial relationship began in 1601 when Marie de Medici, invited five *Frères de la Charité* to Paris. Led by Giovanni Bonelli from Florence, they assumed responsibility for a hospital in a rented house on rue de la Petite Seine, following the issue of letters patent in March 1602. By 1660, the *Frères* managed fifteen hospitals in France, including two foundations granted by the crown in recognition of the order's medical services to the army during the sieges of La Rochelle in 1628 and the military campaign in Picardy in 1636.

In Paris, it took over a decade for the *Frères* to become firmly established. Marie de Medici purchased their rented building on rue de la Petite Seine for them in February 1605, but

⁶¹ Bibliothèque Mazarine (BM), MS 1792, pp. 1–12, 66–73.

⁶² Abelly, *Vie*, i, p. 21 and ii, p. 208.

⁶³ Biographers have generally suggested that de Paul joined the household in 1609, but he was not listed amongst the staff paid for the final quarter of 1609: AN, KK180, f. 112r.

they exchanged this for the Hôtel de Sansac offered by another royal benefactor, Marguerite de Valois, one year later. During these years, the *Frères* undertook significant building and refurbishment projects in both premises, including the provision of infirmary facilities, oratories, and sleeping cells. These demands, as well as the need to attract donations for the routine provision of medical care, placed the order under prolonged financial strain, and it was obliged to petition the crown for further liberties. In January 1610, the king issued letters patent that granted the *Frères* leave to quest in all churches and to receive all donations; the regency government reconfirmed these rights in August 1611. Further awards quickly followed, such as proceeds from the salt harvest, tax exemptions, medical qualifications for their practitioners and new mendicant privileges.⁶⁴ On 27 August 1611, Marguerite de Valois presented the old *église de Saint Pierre* to the order; this lay adjacent to the new house that she had already given and the *Frères* had used it for religious services since Marguerite loaned it to them in October 1606. Under the terms of the contract, the *curé* and *marguilliers* of Saint Sulpice formally ceded the use of the chapel and its cemetery in return for a token rent of one sol annually.⁶⁵ In 1613 Marguerite laid the foundation for a new hospital that she agreed to construct beside this church. It eventually opened in 1631.⁶⁶

As the royal family continued to direct their patronage to the *Frères de la Charité*, de Paul was positioned to participate in fundraising. On 20 October 1611, he donated an impressive 15,000 livres to the *Frères*, in order that they would have ‘greater means to nurse and care for the sick poor that come and go there daily to take refuge and to have their wounds dressed.’ He also intended ‘to help the hospital pay off what is due on the rest of the building they have had constructed there, and to complete the construction.’⁶⁷ Although de Paul was now quite closely attached to the hospital’s work, his possession of 15,000 livres cannot be reconciled with his general history of impecuniosity during this period. An almoner in Marguerite de Valois’ household usually earned between 40 and 400 livres annually and de Paul’s only other serious source of revenue was the yet unrealised, and soon to be contested, revenue from the abbey of Saint-Léonard. His donation was not in reality a gift from him to the *Frères*, as has usually been suggested. Henri IV had initially issued it to four merchants in compensation for the loss of their 300 ton cargo ship from Biarritz in 1594. The previous day, Jean de La Thane, *maître de la*

⁶⁴ BN, MS 1792, pp. 2–3, 8–19, 31–42 and 61–3.

⁶⁵ AN, M766.

⁶⁶ BM, MS 1792, p. 42.

⁶⁷ *Correspondance*, Coste (ed.), xiii, .pp. 14–16.

monnaie in Paris, whom de Paul had known in a formal capacity since at least May 1610, had given the sum to de Paul.⁶⁸ La Thane in turn had received it from the *maître de la monnaie* for Béarn and Navarre, who acted in subrogation for the four merchants. As an individual who worked in the *Hôpital* and as an almoner of one of its principal patrons, de Paul provided the final link in the chain of donation and the money remained in his possession for only one day before he forwarded it to the prior of the *Hôpital*.

When de Paul composed the regulations for the new confraternity in his parish six years later, he consciously drew on his encounter with the *Frères*. At first glance, it might appear that he simply chose to name the new association after its Roman hospital. If this were so, the hospital and confraternity would link simply by the common denominator of charitable service, itself already a general umbrella term for almsgiving, visits to the sick and others initiatives of welfare. It is generally hazardous to identify specific sources for the christocentric charity of service amongst *Dévots* because they drew upon a common corpus of spiritual writing, and the use of terms such as servants of the poor was certainly not exclusive to de Paul and the *Frères*. But de Paul clearly did not pick his model for the confraternal rule at random; his predilection for the language and discipline of service is directly indebted to the *Frères* who provided one of its strongest expositions during the Catholic Reformation. He deliberately sought to imprint the order's influence, and the influence of its religious ethos, upon his new confraternal venture.

Furthermore, rule quite precisely referred to the name of the Roman hospital and to the hospital itself, rather than, for instance, to a confraternity, as one recent study suggested.⁶⁹ Again, in its collective organisation and promotion of service to the poor, the confraternity followed a tradition of charity that was firmly established in the Catholic church. Yet, crucially, when the Châtillon rule is compared to the text of the rule used by the *Frères de la Charité* in their hospitals, it becomes obvious that de Paul's use of the term 'imitation' alluded not simply to the title 'la charité' or to the ethos of the religious order, but also to the forms of charitable care that its members practised. This was not primarily manifested in a word for word repetition of the *Frères*' rule; the intimacy of the two rules is confirmed less by the congruence of language than by the correspondence in the sequence and substance of their procedures.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Diefendorf, *Penitence*, pp. 207–8.

Systematically, both rules offered detailed instructions on the care of patients from the moment that they were admitted to care:

Châtillon: The first thing that she will do will be to see if he has need of a white chemise, in order that, if this is so, she will carry him one of those of the said confraternity, together with white bed drapes.⁷⁰

Frères: He gives him a chemise/chemisette, a headpiece, all white, a bonnet, slippers, a dressing gown . . . a bed decorated with white drapes.⁷¹

The symmetry of materials and provision is striking, the degree of difference a reflection of the fact that the confraternity in Châtillon depended on moderate local donations and good will to provide for the care of patients. Both rules then recommended that the patient should attend confession in preparation to receive communion, before being given eating utensils.⁷² Immediately after this, the rules outlined the order for the two main meals:

Châtillon: She who will be [scheduled] . . . will carry [the meal] to the patients, and, approaching them, will greet them gaily and charitably, will arrange the tray on the bed, put on a towel, a cup and spoon and bread, wash the hands of the sick and say the blessing, pour the soup into a bowl and put the meat on a plate, setting all on the said tray.⁷³

Frères: A religious [goes] to wash the hands of the sick, and another wipes them and kisses them humbly, two others spread their towels, tidy their beds decently, and pray them to say a *pater* and an *ave* for the benefactors . . . the superior says the blessing, and the religious nurse

⁷⁰ ACMP, 'Règlement', f. 3v.

⁷¹ The rule is printed in P. Hélyot, *Dictionnaire des ordres religieux, ou Histoire des ordres monastiques, religieux et militaires et des congrégations séculières de l'un et l'autre sexe, qui ont été établis jusqu'à présente*, J. Migne (ed.), 4 vols (Paris: Ateliers Catholiques du Petit-Montrouge, 1847-63), iv, pp. 620-2. A virtually identical manuscript copy of the rule, dating from the early eighteenth century, can be found in BM, MS 1792, pp. 19-22. Its transcriber, Père Romauld, a former provincial in the order, stated that this rule was used in the order's hospitals since John of God established the first hospital in Grenada.

⁷² ACMP, 'Règlement', f. 4r; Hélyot, *Dictionnaire*, p. 621.

sends what is prescribed to each patient; the others aid the sick to take their broth and other food.

Each rule then proceeded directly to the manner in which patients should be encouraged to live well once recovered from their illness or to learn the art of Christian death. Both recommended that a devotional book be read aloud in the afternoon, but neither specified a particular text. They shared a concern that dying patients should receive extreme unction and that, should they die, they be accompanied to the grave by confraternal members or two *Frères*, as appropriate. However, the Châtillon rule was more expansive on the type of catechesis to be offered to patients, perhaps a reflection of the fact that the brothers in the hospital had more supervision and experience than many of the confreres in this task. The members were asked ‘to lead [souls] by the hand to God, exhorting to bear their illness patiently for love of God, to request forgiveness for their sins, to make acts of contrition and to resolve not to re-offend God once recovered.’⁷³

The confraternity’s rule did not expose a thorough theology of charity, but it differed in degree from the *Frères*’ rule by emphasising intermittently, and more explicitly, the service rendered to the confraternity’s patron, Jesus, through care of the sick poor. Its suggestion that confraternal members place a picture of the crucifixion before patients so that they might ‘reflect on what the Son of God suffered for them’ signals the expectation that patient and benefactor would recognise the mirror image of servitude embodied in the symbol of the cross.⁷⁴ Notably, the initial act of association, issued three months earlier, included the image of servitude to Christ, but it named the ‘Mother of God’ as the association’s patroness, along with the traditional patrons of Châtillon, Saints Martin and Andrew.⁷⁵ Three months later, the definitive rule identified Jesus as the sole patron.⁷⁶ As the confraternity took shape and de Paul defined its purpose precisely, service to its divine protector that imitated his ‘humility, charity and simplicity’ became the defining message of its rule.⁷⁷

⁷³ ACMP, ‘Règlement’, ff. 5v–6r; Hélyot, *Dictionnaire*, p. 622.

⁷⁴ ACMP, ‘Règlement’, f. 4r.

⁷⁵ ACMP, ‘Acte d’association et premier règlement des Dames de la Confrérie de la Charité de Châtillon-les-Dombes’. The regulatory element of this act is very brief.

⁷⁶ ACMP, ‘Règlement’, f. 9v.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 11r.

De Paul's decision to exploit the rule of the *Frères de la Charité* in a parochial environment in 1617 was judicious. The extraction of specific sections of the rule permitted the fledgling confraternity the type of primacy in care, detail in procedure, and service to the poor that was most suitable to its purpose, but did not seek to transform its members into replicas of the hospitaler religious.⁷⁸ At points where the rule of Châtillon diverged from that of the *Frères* it is usually because it chose modes of routine and organisation that did not fit the Augustinian regulations practised by the hospitalers. Therefore, members were directed to meet on every third Sunday to pray and hear mass, listen to a spiritual exhortation, and to discuss their spiritual progress as well as issues arising from their welfare activity. Delving further into the private sphere of interior piety, the rule included a personal rule for members, a parallel but not identical type to that contained in the *Frères*' instruction. The development of a common spirit was to be fostered through daily prayer and regular attendance at mass. Members were also urged to read a chapter of François de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* daily, a recently published exposition of the lay vocation and an indirect endorsement of the confraternity.⁷⁹

In addition, the rule, finely tailored to meet local circumstances in Châtillon parish, did not anticipate that the members would work in co-operation with or under the authority of hospitalers of a religious order. Instead, in domestic settings, these women performed, rather than supplemented, tasks that were normally the duty of the religious. From the moment that the prioress identified a sick patient, he or she moved under the nursing care of her associates, who provided clean clothing, basic medicines and food from provisions purchased by the treasurer. Finally, while the ordained religious were able to provide the full range of spiritual care from within their own ranks, the confraternity's members were expected to partake in a public ministry of evangelical teaching through edifying compassion and patient tutoring in doctrine and through vigilantly ensuring that the patients were offered the sacraments.

These ambitions, transmitted to the provincial parish by de Paul as the fruit of his encounter with activists in Paris, were fundamental characteristics of the Catholic Reformation and its *Dévo*t wing. Between 1608 and 1617, de Paul spun a web of relations amongst Parisian *Dévots*, the material and intellectual fruits of which later sustained and frequently dictated the tactics that he pursued in rural evangelisation, charitable welfare and clerical formation. His

⁷⁸ Ibid., ff. 2r–3v, 6v–7r.

⁷⁹ This directive is not included in another confraternal rule until 1649 when de Paul considered establishing a confraternity of charity at the royal court: ACMP, 'Règlement', ff. 2r–3v, 6v–7r, 9v–10r.

relationships with the Gondis, Bérulle and the Oratory, and the *Frères de la Charité*, enabled de Paul to ease his way into *Dévo*t networks and engagements. They simultaneously exposed him to a stimulating distillation of pious practices that transformed Parisian religious life, and from which he extracted the organisational tools, examples, and spiritual principles that he first translated into practical form in the provincial locality of Châtillon.