**Revolution in Charity**

**Introduction**

Every age has its own attitude towards that constant social problem, the care of the poor. Few things are more revealing of the inner life of a period, than the spirit in which people regard their less fortunate brethren, and the action they take in consequence. Any change in the theory or administration of charity, therefore, should be peculiarly interesting for the historian.

France in the seventeenth century saw precisely such a change. The name usually associated with it is that of St. Vincent de Paul, founder of such organizations as the Sisters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission. Under the direction of Monsieur Vincent, ladies of the nobility, middle-class women, and peasant girls joined in visiting hospitals and prisons, in nursing the sick, feeding the poor, and adding war-devastated provinces. Both city and countryside shared in this benevolence. That the movement by Vincent de Paul marked a revolution in the exercise of charity is undeniable. There is nothing like it in scale or in fervor to be found in previous French history.

Social, economic, and even political factors probably played a role in the evolution of the new charity. An investigation along these lines is, however, beyond the scope of this essay, which will be concerned with religious motivation, as far as it can be ascertained. Here enters the name of St. Francis de Sales, for if Vincent de Paul was the great organizer of charity, St. Francis de Sales was his counterpart in its theory.