écrire une seule ligne sur leur spiritualité. N'est-ce pas un trait de mentalité important ? N'est-ce pas un facteur qui a dû influencer l'échelle de valeur de ces religieuses puisqu'elles consacraient la majorité de leur temps aux exercices spirituels ? Quels auteurs spirituels lisaient-elles ou suivaient-elles ? N'en est-il pas question dans les *Annales* ?

Malgré les nombreuses questions que soulève la lecture du premier ouvrage d'envergure de Micheline D'Allaire, *L'Hôpital-Général de Québec* n'en reste pas moins une intéressante contribution à l'étude sociale des communautés religieuses du Canada d'Ancien Régime. Sa valeur est indiscutable quoique bien relative. Cette étude constitue un commencement dans un secteur à peu près inexploré de l'histoire; c'est donc comme tel que l'historiographie classera et appréciera l'œuvre de Micheline D'Allaire en histoire sociale.

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ANTHONY SUTCLIFFE. — *The Autumn of Central Paris. The Defeat of Town Planning 1850-1970*, London, Edward Arnold, 1970.

Cities inevitably last longer than do fashions in architecture or urban design. By so doing they constantly remind us how different the past — whether that past be the seventeenth century, the 1920's, or 1965 — was from the present. As the rate of historical change increases, the incongruity between the physical shape of our cities and the life-styles and aspirations of the men who inhabit them grows ever greater. One explanation for the current fascination with cities by historians may be that they represent the remains of a dead or dying culture, and the intensity of our attempts to preserve and rehabilitate them may reflect a reactionary desire to reverse the historical forces that are making the city as we have known it obsolete.

Every age has had to make do with the urban environment bequeathed it by its ancestors. Photographs of Victorian London remind us that it remained through most of the nineteenth century a Georgian city, with the suburbs and the occasional new public building or street improvement as gestures of protest against the overwhelmingly pre-Victorian fabric. The ubiquitous 90-year building lease left the dubious honor of destroying eighteenth-century London to the twentieth century.

Most of Georgian and much of Victorian London is now gone, yet across the Channel Paris looks much as it did a century ago. Anthony Sutcliffe, in his fascinating study of the inner Right Bank over the past 120 years, remarks that although the London of Dickens has long since vanished, "in central Paris most streets could still serve as a setting for a story by Balzac or Victor Hugo,

and Maupassant would certainly be able to find his way unerringly there." Focussing on the first four *arrondissements,* extending from the Seine northward to the *grands boulevards,* and from the Place de la Bastille westward to the Place de la Concorde, he asks whether "the survival of old Paris [has been] a triumph for enlightened conservation, or a defeat for material progress ?" (P. 1.) He shows that it has been neither, being rather the consequence of the accidents of history combined with the peculiar nature of the Parisian building industry and the French capital market. And if the result represents a defeat of town planning, it is a defeat which lovers of Paris will find it hard to regret.

Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann subjected central Paris to the kind of fundamental upheaval that has gone on over the past decade in America in the name of urban renewal or "saving the central city." Contemporary Englishmen marvelled at the immensity of the changes that Second Empire Paris was undergoing, but the city that resulted was, by and large, the Paris we know today. For although enough of the impetus remained during the early Third Republic to permit the completion of several Imperial projects, the job was essentially finished by the 1890's. Even the *Métro* of this century, which followed the lines of the new boulevards and street improvements and did not extend into the suburbs, intensified the impact of Haussmann's planning rather than providing an alternative pattern. Two wars left the capital physically intact, while inflation and economic depression saved Paris from the ruthless speculative demolition and reconstruction that have altered twentieth-century London far more drastically than did the *Luftwaffe.* By the time France, in the late 1950's, was economically in a position to rebuild its capital, the preservationists had been able to convince the most philistine of politicians and civil servants that it was a treasure to be cherished rather than an anachronism to be destroyed.

In any given period it is possible to approach town planning from an aesthetic, moral, or hygienic point of view, each of which may have goals irreconcilable with those of the others. Each, too, follows changing fashions. In the 1840's ventilation seemed the antidote to all urban ills; by the 1880's it was suburbanization and low-density development; today it has become concentration and the re-establishment of urban cohesion. Periods admiring symmetry and straight lines alternate with ones stressing the beauty of irregularity and the desirability of variety and happy surprises. Schemes stressing the separation of functions are succeeded by those advocating a healthy mixture of complementary uses. Within a single decade "urban renewal" has turned from a progressive battle-cry into a term of reproach. It is fortunate that our towns change less rapidly than our views of town planning. It was the particular good fortune of Paris that its transformation, radical though it was, took place within the framework of a single phase in the history of town planning, of which it remains today the world's best expression.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as Dr. Sutcliffe explains, "much more than in any other period, street improvements appeared to be a panacea for every urban problem." From a sanitary point of view, they seemed "the only practical means of demolishing slum houses in any numbers... the best way of fighting disease seemed to be to demolish as many old houses as possible, or at least to allow air and sunlight to reach them." Quite apart from their military advantages, the broad, straight lines of the new streets conformed with contemporary aesthetic beliefs: "street improvements... added to the beauty of the city... Straight and level streets were also desirable from the points of view of traffic flow, provision of attractive building sites, and sewer and conduit construction." (Pp. 27-33.) But the improvements were at best façades, behind which the old city remained as it had been.

Each of the theoretical justifications for Haussmanite urban renewal has been questioned by later generations of town planners. It is a commonplace today that new facilities for traffic create more congestion than they relieve. The provision of currents of air and pools of sunlight has been shown to affect at best the healthiness of dwellings facing directly on the artery, leaving the adjacent dwellings to the rear as disease-ridden as ever; in any event, the dramatic fall in death rates since the late nineteenth century has resulted more from a rise in the general standard of living, improvements in diet, and advances in medical knowledge, than improvements in housing as such. Finally, the aesthetic dominance of classicism and the grand manner came to be challenged, even in France.

The maintenance of Haussmann's visual intensions, as his schemes were pursued even after 1870, can be explained in part by the persistence of classical architectural taste in France until well into the Third Republic. Only very late in the century did French aesthetes discover the dangerous charms of the picturesque and begin to hanker after irregularity and asymmetry. By then, the major transformation of Paris was complete: it had been systematically rebuilt, and the money was not forthcoming, either through public or private channels, for it to be rebuilt again. Central Paris remains therefore a city of the Ancien Régime with Second Empire frontages. The outskirts of Paris today serve as a cautionary example of what its center might have been like had aesthetic conservatism not been reinforced by economic depression at just the right time. The new City of London that has arisen since the war serves as another.

Despite the increasing antiquity of its buildings, central Paris is more than an aesthetically pleasing slum. Yet Dr. Sutcliffe's account of the operations of the building industry there over the past 120 years might have led one to expect ever-increasing congestion and squalor developing behind the impressive façades of the boulevards. The immediate effect of the Haussmannite

demolitions, unaccompanied by a public housing program, by forcing up land values in the center, was "the overcrowding of surviving areas of cheap accommodation in the centre and the creation of slums on the outskirts." (P. 42.) Even in the nineteenth century builders tended to concentrate on middle-class and commercial developments, while the First World War brought new housing construction to a halt. Public housing in the interwar period provided for no more than 25% of the population increase, and private building did nothing to fill the gap:

> ...The inability of private enterprise to construct dwellings for the working classes had become apparent long before 1914, and it was made even more intractable by the various rent control measures enacted during the war. Although rents of new buildings were not controlled, the diminished return on property investment resulted in the diversion of much capital to stocks and shares, which now... provided a better return than did buildings. Many of the people of small independent means, who had been an important source of building investment before the war, had been ruined by 1918. The only branches of construction which prospered were shops and offices... and small villas in the suburbs.... Building was no longer an attractive long-term investment as it had been before 1914.... After 1945, inflation and economic instability continued to restrict the building industry to a very low level of activity.... Only after about 1958 did the economic climate become more favourable to building enterprise, and even then building did not enjoy the same prosperity as other sectors of the economy. The housing shortage has remained a serious problem (pp. 254-6).

Where did that leave the French working classes? The answer seems to be, healthier and presumably happier than ever, insofar as improvements in medical knowledge and public health proceeded regardless of any deterioration in the domestic environment. As real income per capita rose and inflation combined with rent controls made the costs of housing absurdly low, the ordinary French family was able to improve the quality of its diet in particular at an even faster rate than it could otherwise have done. One wonders how well the popular image of the superbly fed, abominably housed French workingman contrasted with the superbly housed, abominably fed English workingman fits the evidence. The Frenchman and the Englishman are comparably healthy and long-lived, although one would imagine that the Frenchman has better teeth and the Englishman a less ravaged liver. Overcrowding, poor ventilation, and the absence of direct sunlight no longer seem to matter. Or, rather, their impact is now psychological rather than a literal matter of life and death. The Frenchman's access to the kind of food available only in his country, food which postwar affluence enables him to afford in abundance, must make up for the psychological gloom of substandard housing, as well as counteract its unhealthy qualities. For French food is surely more life-enhancing in the nutritional as well as the aesthetic and moral sense than what passes for such in the English-speaking world.

The housing afforded even by central Paris, while obsolescent by ordinary standards, does not seem to be all that deplorable. Since the war an increasing proportion of the dwellings in the center have acquired running water, baths, and water-closets, while the outward movement of population towards the suburbs has reduced serious overcrowding. The Ile St. Louis and a growing section of the *Marais* have been taken over by middle-class residents; the area as a whole "retains a balanced community which very closely reflects the socio-economic composition of the whole of the population of Paris." (P. 293.) Dr. Sutcliffe nevertheless foresees gradual social, economic, and physical decline, a decline which has been going on for nearly two centuries, and which Haussmann's improvements slowed but could not permanently reverse. Any American central city today would gladly settle for that kind, and that rate of decline.

Dr. Sutcliffe shows in masterly detail how central Paris has been saved from the attentions both of the town planner and the private developer, from social as well as from physical blight. One explanation is the solidity of the buildings themselves, which were likely to be built as permanent investments rather than as speculations for quick disposal, the usual practice in London:

> The Paris area had always been the source of excellent building materials, and, whatever might be said about the design of the older Paris houses, the quality of their construction was never in doubt. Indeed, it was a positive embarrassment when demolition was desirable for public health or social reasons.... Even when badly built houses began to collapse they were often supported by their neighbours. And it has always been accepted that a well built Paris house will stand without difficulty for several hundred years.

For this reason few houses, however old and obsolescent, ever "actually fell down of their own accord, or became so clear a danger to the public that they had to be condemned." The large leasehold estates in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield, and other British towns have often facilitated programs of comprehensive redevelopment. In Paris, by contrast, "the extreme fragmentation of land ownership and the inconvenient shape of many sites" have proved a "serious obstacle to reconstruction..." (P. 270.)

Provincial jealousy of Paris prevented the use of national resources for its embellishment except during the authoritarian regimes of the Second Empire and Fifth Republic, which were "eager to exalt Paris" as an expression of national glory. (P. 327.) The hopes that the publicly financed improvements of the Second Empire would stimulate private rebuilding proved unjustified: "Not only had the street improvement policy failed to ensure the spontaneous renewal of the centre, but it had positively retarded it by accelerating the development of densely populated slum areas inhabited largely by poor tenants displaced from the areas affected by the works." (Pp. 328-9.)

Where once economic stagnation, bureaucratic delays, and provincial jealousies served unwittingly to prevent the piecemeal destruction of central Paris, today its preservation has become a conscious national policy:

> It is very probable that within twenty years the whole of the right bank centre, which in the meantime will hardly have changed at all, will be protected [as an historic area]. The present ossification of the area will have been legalised and exalted, as a result of over a century of failure to cheapen compulsory purchase, to recuperate betterment values, and to restrict residential densities in order to reduce the dimensions of the rehousing problem. The success of the conservation policy will depend mainly on its attracting middle-class residents .... This movement is now becoming possible to envisage as more and more families acquire a second home. An apartment with a central position, even in a closely-built area, will become increasingly attractive to those who can afford to maintain a country villa for their periods of leisure. The traditional development of the centre will thus be reversed as business gives way to residence (p. 331).

In other words, if the buildings are structurally sound, aesthetically pleasing, and centrally located, slum clearance, if postponed long enough, becomes unnecessary.

Looking at our cities, and in particular at what we have done to them over the past generation, suggests that with respect to urban design we are in an Alexandrian age: we had better devote our energies to copying and editing ancient manuscripts than engage in vain attempts to vie with fifth-century Athens for originality and creativity. Whatever the triumphs of individual architects and town planners in the twentieth century, the English- and French-speaking worlds at least seem never to have regained the visual sense that both lost sometimes in the nineteenth century. Until we get it back, probably the best we can do is to preserve what has, whether by design or accident, been left to us by our more urbane ancestors. We ought of course to do the necessary minimum to adapt our urban heritage to the inescapable requirements of the twentieth century, but for the most part our task is to adapt the twentieth century to the requirements of our urban heritage. Rather than continue the grisly work of making our cities conform to contemporary culture — that would make the whole world a Southern California — let us make ourselves worthy of the cities we inhabit. Perhaps that is going a bit far: one can imagine a more inspiring call to action than becoming worthy of Winnipeg, Detroit, or Wolverhampton. But central Paris is another matter, and we ought to rejoice more wholeheartedly than Dr. Sutcliffe seems to wish us to, that town planning as a destroying rather than a preserving force has there, at least, been defeated.

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