

Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813 – 1853)

Biography

To beatify someone does not mean to erect a statue of the person. On the contrary, according to the Latin etymology (*beatificare = beatum facere*), it means “to make happy”.

Indeed, in beatifying Frederic Ozanam, the Church solemnly proclaims in the light of God and for all eternity to all of Christendom, and all youth in particular, the sanctity of the principal founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. At the same time we are all “made happy” because this admirable witness given by one of our brothers in Christ and in humanity fills us with joy, hope and courage.

Over the centuries, the Church has raised men and women to the altar; many have been adults, some elderly, and others vowed to celibacy as a result of their monastic or priestly vows.

But now we are offered a young man as a model, whose life though brief (April 23rd 1813 to September 8th 1853) was nonetheless exceptionally blessed. This young man elevated family, conjugal and fatherly love to a great height. His many and varied commitments, all sustained with the same spiritual vigour, were dedicated to faith and charity, to the Church, to the poor, to science and to democratic spirit. Last but not least, he was a man of flesh, blood and spirit just like us, who incarnated a type of Christian with whom we can identify. He also incarnated an ideal which was nourished by the Gospel and provided answers both to the questionings of his contemporaries and to the concerns of our generation.

We can never forget that the 19th century, in which Ozanam lived and worked, was the preparation for our 20th century which has now ended. In a similar fashion to the last century, this century is moved by new ideas and technological, economic, social and spiritual change.

Yet one can say quite truly that Ozanam’s life was unique. To insensitive eyes and heart his existence can seem to resemble many others. In fact, it has a more and more powerful influence over our world, this modern world which is so eager for light. When we call upon the Blessed Ozanam for help, it should not be first and foremost to obtain some favour, but above all to ask that our lives as men and women, especially the youth of the world, be invigorated by his example and his witness.

A man rooted in his time

A Man like us

Frederic Ozanam has sometimes been pictured as a holy man who was quite remote from the world – so given to God, to piety, to holy works, that he could seem unfamiliar with ordinary human passion. This image of him must be discarded once and for all. For when we become acquainted with Frederic’s writings and with his marvellous and numerous correspondence, and when we read the witnesses of his daily life, we discover a fascinating soul, a generous heart which was never satisfied and always on the alert, beating at the same rhythm as that of his next of kin, his friends and his brothers and sisters in adversity.

A man of flesh and blood

Frederic was not different from other human beings.

He led a fully human life which was transformed, even made sublime, by a holiness which he acquired progressively, it never gave way to a puritan outlook.

Just like all of us, Frederic was confronted as the days went by with ordinary daily life, much of which was grey and flat.

Like everyone of us, Frederic was concerned about his health, the condition of his family, his standard of living, his future, his success, his promotion in the university, winning such and such a prize or decoration, or quite simply, that life was slipping by and not allowing him to pursue his scientific work as far as he would have wished.

One should add that like a true Frenchman, Frederic did not turn down a good meal or a good wine.

A religious Sensibility

Man does not live on bread alone; above all, he needs spiritual food. Frederic was provided with this thanks to his parents and teachers. However, during his adolescence, like many young people, he was assailed with doubts about the truths of faith and the Christian meaning of life. It was sometimes hard to imagine a possible harmony between Divine Revelation and the modern world that was already turning away from God and thirsty for technical progress.

While he, too, lived through this "night of faith", Frederic remained deeply attached to the creed of his childhood. He forced himself to persevere in his religious duties, to pray and receive the sacraments. The habit of examining his conscience enabled him to track down what he considered to be the four main obstacles that hindered the progress of grace within him: pride, impatience, weakness and meticulousness.

A Lucid Mind

Frederic was lucid about himself and his faults. This moved him, on the one hand, to ask forgiveness of those who were wounded by his changes in mood; on the other, to maintain an attitude of humility which was only to be intensified over the years with the failing of his health and the trials towards the end of his life. This created in him a genuine spiritual poverty, even to the point of his achieving surrender to the divine will.

In 1848, he wrote to his friend Foisset: *"My youth is fading away and I cannot see myself becoming any better for it. In three months I will be 35 years old. Even supposing that I follow what remains of the path faithfully to the bitter end, I am afraid of finding myself empty-handed."*

To Dufieux in 1850 he wrote: *"I have known myself for a long time and if God has been kind enough to grant me a little fervour in my work, I have never taken this grace to be the dazzling gift of genius. No doubt I have wished to devote my life to the service of faith, but considering myself only as a useless servant, as a worker of the eleventh hour..."*

If Frederic defended his ideas with spirit, he was nonetheless, deeply respectful of the stand taken by those who did not share them: "Let us learn to stand up for our convictions without hating our adversaries, and to love those who think differently from us."

On the other hand, he had difficulty enduring the obstinacy of intolerant people: "the bigwigs of orthodoxy who see their political opinions as the 13th article of the Symbole." We find him rebelling against certain articles in "The Universe", the extremely right-wing newspaper of Louis Veuillot, who was the leader of the obstinate Catholics who opposed the liberal Catholics.

To his friend Alexandre Dufieux, who seemed shaken by Veuillot's arguments, Ozanam sent a letter: *"Would I, dear friend, be worn out with exhaustion at 37 years of age, then,*

and handicapped by premature and cruel infirmities, if I had not been sustained by the desire and hope of serving Christianity? Certainly I am nothing but a poor sinner before God, but he has not yet permitted that I cease believing or that I deny, conceal or tone down a single article of our faith."

Frederic Ozanam was a man of the Gospel Beatitudes: poor in spirit, gentle, pure in heart, and persecuted for the sake of justice, for having been the leader of the "party of love", founded by Christ.

A Family Man

Antoine Frederic Ozanam was born on April 23rd 1813, in Milan, Italy.

The Ozanams were originally from Dombes, the south-western part of the province of Ain, to the north-west of Lyon in France. Frederic's father, Jean Antoine François Ozanam was born in 1773, in Chalomont in Dombes.

Son of a royal notary, who under Louis XV had become a royal judge, Jean Antoine had under his jurisdiction Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne, the village where Saint Vincent de Paul, parish priest there in 1617, had founded the first "brotherhood of Charity".

The French Revolution took place and disrupted everything, particularly the life of the citizens of Lyon. Jean Antoine Ozanam was a law clerk at the age of 20 when he was affected by the military draft of all young single people. He became one of the "Soldiers of Year II" who would be exalted by Victor Hugo.

With the 1st Hussars, he was sub-lieutenant in 1796 and took part in the Italian campaign led by Bonaparte. Demobilized in 1799, Jean Antoine settled in Lyon where on April 22nd 1800 he married Marie Nantas, the 19 year old daughter of a Lyon silk merchant. Marie Nantas was to be a devoted companion to her husband and an exemplary mother to her children.

Jean Ozanam settled with his wife in Lyon and was initiated into the silk trade by his father-in-law. However, the day after the birth of their first child, Elisabeth (February, 1801), the Ozanams were faced with financial difficulties that were to last for several years. Jean Antoine was often without work. He moved to Paris at the end of 1801 and embarked upon business dealings which were always unsuccessful and which often took him abroad.

In 1807, he left the capital and settled his wife and children in Lyon. He then went off to travel all over Italy as a salesperson. In 1809 he called his family to Milan where they settled. On December 27th 1810, after a year of strenuous work, he qualified as candidate for Doctor of Medicine. He was to become "the good Doctor Ozanam".

But, due to Napoleon's misfortunes, they were obliged to leave Milan on October 31st 1816. They sailed to Marseille and settled again in Lyon, on rue Pizay, close to the Town Hall. Doctor Ozanam became a doctor at the Hotel-Dieu Hospital in 1817.

Frederic worshipped his father's memory. If Doctor Ozanam was a man of science whose research and work stood in the forefront of a medical science still somewhat archaic, he was first and foremost a model family doctor who was untiring, human and compassionate. He considered medicine to be a vocation, and he would often tell his

children that to carry out this mission fittingly one had to be prepared to give one's life for one's patients. During the bloody 1831 riots and the deadly cholera epidemic of 1832, they would witness the truth of such a remark in their father's dedication.

A Filial Affection

Frederic retained a powerful memory of his mother. Her deeply Christian faith, that has been tempered by so many trials, helped her share with her husband a life of unremitting work that was invigorated by daily prayer and the practice of the Gospel virtues. The religious life of the Ozanam family blossomed in the setting of the Lyon parish of Saint Peter and Saint Saturnine. It was on his mother's lap that Frederic, like the other children, learned of the grandeur and gentleness of God and gained a taste for prayer and the practical virtues. At night, the whole household would gather around Jean Antoine and Marie for evening prayer, which was followed by a devotional reading.

And what a warm home! A certain austerity was tempered by limitless affection as well humour and cheerfulness.

Besides his mother, Frederic benefited from the warmth of two other female presences: one was his older sister, Elisa (Elisabeth) – twelve years older than he was, of whom he wrote: *"I had a sister, a beloved sister who educated me along with my mother and my childhood lessons in which I found real pleasure"*. The other was the faithful family housekeeper, Marie Cruziat, nicknamed *"Guigui"*. She was already 45 years old when Frederic was born and died only in 1857, aged 89, having serving in the household of three generations of Ozanams for 72 years.

Steadfast in Times of Trial

Yet this happiness was not the whole story: there was another side to the Ozanam family. The repeated bereavements must have taken their toll. Of the fourteen children born to Jean and Marie, eleven died; ten of these were girls and almost of them died very young or were stillborn. Only the eldest survived. She was the guardian angel of the little ones, a friend and companion to her mother, and the apple of her father's eye. Being a good musician himself, he had Elisa take music lessons as well as classes in drawing and English. And then on November 29th 1820, Elisa, a gentle young girl, was carried off by death at the age of 19.

The fact of having seen his father and mother weep so much over the loss of their children must have intensified Frederic's natural sensitivity and made him even more attentive to the lives and to the pain of his fellow human beings. Coming from a family whose means were often slender, Frederic learned that material poverty is not only the hallmark of those who are called "poor" but also that it is often present around those who are called "middle class".

"I feel like giving thanks to God for having being born in a social position which was on the borderline between financial difficulty and being comfortably off. Such a position accustoms one to hardship without leaving one totally ignorant of enjoyment. In that position one cannot go to sleep at night satisfied in one's desires but one is not preoccupied either by the constant call of need". (Letter to François Lallier, November 5th 1836).

He also owed to his mother's example the concern that he showed throughout his life towards the men and women of the working classes. Despite the fact that she was

overwhelmed with domestic work, she still found the time to dedicate herself to the Saint Pierre section of the Society of "Nightwatchers", made up of volunteer working women who took turns to spend the night with women who were sick or in distress.

After the death of their three month-old Louis-Benoît, in 1822, and the birth in 1824 of their last child, Charles, the Ozanam family found itself reduced to three children: Alphonse (1804-1888) who was to be a priest and receive the title of Monsignor, Charles (1824-1890) who was to be a doctor like his father and Frederic, born in 1813.

The return to the Lord of all their little sisters, then of their father (1837), and mother (1839) naturally intensified the bonds that united the three Ozanam brothers.

After his marriage to Amélie Soulacroix, in the church of Saint-Nizier, in Lyon, on June 23rd 1841, Frederic showed the same filial devotion towards his father and mother-in-law: a respect mingled with deep affection.

A Man of Two Cities: Lyon and Paris

One day Frederic Ozanam declared: *"It has been said that Paris is the head of the kingdom and that Lyon is its heart"*. What was true for France was equally true in Frederic's life. If professional obligations divided his life between the capital and the seat of the Primate of the Gauls, Frederic's thoughts were frequently most often in Paris, which could not be ignored as the indisputable cultural centre, whereas his heart remained in Lyon.

Lyon: Spiritual Centre, Seat of Rebellion

There is plentiful evidence of Frederic's attachment to Lyon, the city where he spent his childhood, adolescence and some of the best years of his youth and where he got married. As he wrote in 1832, *"childhood habits, family affections and the bonds of friendship"* linked him to this city. Mentions of these abound in his correspondence, for example, in a letter addressed to Dominique Meynis from Paris in 1843: *" You know that I have remained very attached to Lyon in the depths of my heart... Since I have been called to my perilous duties in Paris, every year I have gone to place them under the patronage of Our Lady of Fourvière, to whom I was dedicated from early childhood."*

He also wrote, again from Paris, to his brother Charles, in 1850: *"I am writing these few words so that you never pass through Lyon without finding a reminder of me, and so that you do not feel alone in a city where everything is shared by us, and where you must think even more vividly of all those whom we miss."* (Frederic's father and mother lie and rest in the Lyon cemetery).

When the Ozanam family settled in Lyon in 1816, the city consisted of only 140,000 inhabitants. In 1846 there were 180,000, the growth in population being noticeable in la Guillotière and on the Hill of the Croix-Rousse. Here, taking advantage of the sale of former monastic land, the silk workers set up new workshops with ceilings high enough to contain the Jacquart looms whose technical efficiency ensured Lyon's supremacy in the silk trade. In 1831, at the time when the silk workers rebelled against the terms of the salary imposed on them by the manufacturers, foremen in the silk workshops numbered 8,000.

Frederic was in love with this city situated at the confluence of the Rhone and Saone, with its high narrow streets, its embankments, its hills, its "slopes", its panoramas, its cheerful surroundings, its noise – the clatter of the looms, the stamping of the horses pulling the

countless heavy cargoes of silk bundles, and its active and industrious population.

Lyon was above all a spiritual centre whose vitality was to play a large part in making Frederic Ozanam one of the pioneers of the Catholic Renewal in France. In 1905 a journalist rightly pointed out that "the city of Lyon has always been one of the centres where the spiritual life and Christian thought exist in all their intensity and this is likely to become more and more true. The soul of the natives of Lyon is deeply religious and accompanied by a remarkably practical and cool spirit and a bold and enterprising character."

Lyon was the cradle of the first Christian community and of the first Episcopal Church of the Gauls (2nd century), from which comes the title of "Primate of the Gauls" given to its Archbishop. It was again a fervent religious centre from the 11th to the 14th centuries; throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Lyon enjoyed an intense spiritual vitality ("Lyon School", the "Social Chronicle" the spiritual Resistance during the Second World War).

Soon after a revolution which had dismantled it, the Church in Lyon found its footing again, thanks in particular to Cardinal Joseph Fesch, Napoleon's uncle. The Church's works of mercy and institutions grew in number. The most influential and universal of these was the Propagation of the Faith, founded in 1820 by Pauline Jaricot, the daughter of a Lyon clothing merchant. She became the symbol and foundation stone of the rebirth of the French Catholic missions. Frederic, who was one of the driving forces behind this movement, always considered it as typically part of his home city. In 1845, when he was the Paris correspondent for the Lyon Council of the Propagation, he wrote: *"Just as neither Saint Irenaeus nor Our Lady of Fourvière can be taken from us, we cannot be robbed of the Propagation of the Faith either."*

The poor, in Lyon more than anywhere else, cried out for the attention and dedication of Catholics. During the great floods of 1840, the new Archbishop, Monsignor Maurice de Bonald, estimated the number of the poor in Lyon at 20,000. The mortality rate there was higher than in the rest of France, rising as high as 30 in every 1000 in 1834, due to a year of destitution, strikes, unrest and typhoid and smallpox epidemics. During the winter of 1829 -1830, the intense cold had lasted from early October to late February, and the mortality rate had doubled. And one must not forget the bloody rebellions of the silk workers in November 1831 and April 1834, which caused hundreds of deaths.

It is not surprising then that, very early on, Frederic tried to develop the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Lyon, where he lived from 1836 to 1841.

This picture of a fervent Lyon must not eclipse the existence during the same period of powerful anti-clerical movements in this city of silk manufacturers and silk workers: in 1820, ten Masonic lodges were rebuilt. As always, Frederic was very sensitive to the very noticeable alliance between middle class egoism and lack of belief. On January 15th 1831, he expressed the aversion he felt for the new class in power: *"They live an industrialized and materialistic life, each is concerned with his own personal comfort and well being... Material order, a modicum of freedom, bread and money, that's all they are interested in."*

This atmosphere of unbelief succeeded in sowing the seeds of doubts in the heart of the adolescent. In October 1822, he went to the Royal College of Lyon and studied Classics with brilliant results. In 1827, his studies in Rhetoric caused him to question his faith. However, it was at the same college, thanks to his philosophy teacher, Father Joseph

Mathias Noiro, that he gained both peace of mind and spiritual enlightenment.

In 1829, with a Bachelor in Arts, he decided to *“devote his life to the service of the truth”*. He even envisaged a *“demonstration of the Catholic religion from historical, religious and moral beliefs in Antiquity.”*

Frederic’s dream was nurtured by his reading of Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Lamennais, renowned apologists of Christianity captivating so many young people of that period, and whose style and argumentation were to influence Ozanam. He also rediscovered peace of mind and his enthusiasm as a young Christian in the company of two great thinkers who were natives of Lyon but whom he met in Paris: Andre Marie Ampère (1775-1836), member of the Lyon Academy who wrote a dissertation on the *“Historical Proofs of the Divine Nature of Christianity”*, and Pierre Simon Ballanche (1776-1847), a writer who in 1801, had his work *“Of Sentiment”* printed on his father’s press, a work which prefigured *“The Genius of Christianity”*; Ballanche was the one who communicated to the young Frederic the hope which he invested, as a citizen and Christian, in the spirit of liberty and solidarity.

In October 1830, Frederic, who was drawn to the study of the Arts and History, but whose father wanted him to study Law, began working as a clerk for Jean Baptiste Coulet, an attorney to the Lyon Magistrates’ Court. One year later, on November 1st 1831, Frederic bought a ticket on the coach of the Royal Mail Service that was to take him on a four-day journey to Paris where he was going to study Law.

Paris: Intellectual Capital; Melting Pot of Poverty

On November 5th 1831, Frederic Ozanam discovered the capital. Right away the capital disappointed him. The sight and even the visits of its monuments did not impress him. He quickly became conscious that beyond its beauties and its lights *“Old Lutetia”* flaunted its *“horrors, its shacks, its corruption”* Ostentatious luxury rubbed shoulders with appalling poverty, the same poverty that Victor Hugo was to depict a few years later in *“Les Miserables”*.

The Paris de of Louis-Phillipe in which Frederic settled was not yet the Paris which Baron Haussmann (appointed Prefect of the Seine on June 28th 1853) was to transform into the *“City of Light”* where some 700,000 Parisians lived. Many lived in precarious conditions in this metropolis that was ill-adapted to the demands of modern life.

With the exception of the aristocratic neighbourhoods, everywhere else there were dilapidated tall tenements and overarching narrow streets. There were grimy and cluttered, with no pavements or drains. They reverberated with the cries of the tradesmen, and the noise created by the uneven cobblestones and the bad repair of the wheels and springs of carriages drawn by horses. It is understandable that the dreadful spectacle of cholera, which claimed million of victims in the capital in 1832, shattered Frederic.

The majority of the inhabitants had such meagre incomes that still in 1846, out of the population of about a million inhabitants, more than 650,000 were exempt from taxation. Two out of three of these were unable to pay for their death shrouds, the mortality rate was 30 out of every 1000, was higher than the national average. 11,000 out of the 27,000 annual deaths occurred in hospitals, which was a considerable proportion when one recalls the fear that people had for those places.

Prior to the 1848 revolutions, Paris contained 300,000 destitute people who were numerous in the arrondissements and suburbs. The city was eaten away by the raw wounds of irremediable moral depravity, abandoned children, prostitution, cohabitation among the workers and common people. It is necessary to take account of these miseries and misfortunes in order to understand Frederic Ozanam's vocation for social charity.

Quite naturally this city, with its revolutionary tradition, and whose narrow streets were suitable for making barricades, became the scene of social eruptions. Frederic was a witness to the workers' uprisings of 1832, 1833 and 1834, as well as to the enforcement of tough police laws, after the attempt made by Fieschi on the life of the King Louis-Phillippe in July 1835.

One can understand that in this macabre city of Paris, Frederic Ozanam was at first perplexed, discouraged and indeed frightened. This all the more for the fact that his deeply sensitive nature bore his solitude with difficulty, and especially the separation from those he held most dear: *"I am so used to family chatter..., and here I am thrown, without any support, or any rallying point, into this capital of egoism, into this whirlwind of passion and human error." ... "How I miss my parents. I am too young to be able to get used to coming back to a deserted home and going to bed without having anyone to tell what's on my mind. Separated from those I love I cannot put down roots in this foreign soil. In myself I feel a childlike need to live in the family home, close beside my father and mother, and this need withers in the air of this capital."*

Happily, it was the Latin Quarter in which Frederic lived, with its 5,000 students. Many came from Lyon and in the heart of this colony of natives of Lyon, with André Marie Ampère, who opened up his home to him, Frederic found his joy of living again and was able to preserve his Christian faith.

At the time Paris was considered to be "one of the capitals of disbelief": an important number of the propertied and ruling upper and middle class as well as the majority of academics were supporters of Voltaire. This fostered an atmosphere that Frederic could only escape by keeping the company of dedicated Christians like Emmanuel Bailly and André-Marie Ampère, or by the company of liberal Catholic intellectuals. Frederic admired their combination of faith, eloquence, courage and freedom of mind and expression. They were: Felicity de Lamennais, Henry Lacordaire, Charles de Montalembert and Lamartine.

It was by listening to these teachers that Frederic convinced himself "that somewhere the words of a believers must be uttered, a religious education must be given, at a level of competence and notoriety that would thwart the teachers of the public who are broadcasting rationalist doctrine." (Marcel Vincent).

Yet Frederic was in Paris, above all, to complete his studies. After obtaining his degrees - Bachelor of Law (1834) of Arts (1835), Doctor in Law (1836) and in Arts (1839) - he became an attorney of the Bar in Lyon in 1837. It was in the city of Lyon that in 1839 he became a tenured Professor of Commercial Law. The following year, he passed the aggregation exam of the Faculty of Arts and, although recently appointed, specialized in teaching. On October 9th 1840, he was appointed deputy to Claude Fauriel as a professor in Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne. After getting married, the newlyweds settled in Paris. Frederic was given tenure at the Sorbonne in 1844 and in 1845 they were graced with the charming

addition to their home of a little girl, Marie.

Frederic, who had been feeling sour about life in the capital for a long time, then acknowledged that Paris was really the city *"in which everything comes alive: one's ideas, spiritual work, conversation, even the most insignificant of the society acquaintances"*.

A Man who was all heart

Frederic was all heart: throughout his entire life, his whole being came alive when in contact with others, whether they were friends, parents or students. In his letters, he expressed countless times his need for others: *"I number myself among those who need to feel they are surrounded with love and support, and God has never allowed me to lack in either of these."* And again, when he was 18 years old, in a letter to Auguste Materne: *"Oh, my friend! May the law of love be our law, and then, trampling all vainglory underfoot, our heart will no longer burn for anything else but for God, for men and for true happiness."*

A network of Friendships

In Frederic's life, love and friendship were inseparable. It is rare, in the history of Christianity and of the saints to find a sensibility like this. It was constantly tuned into the joys and sorrows of those he loved. No doubt this is a reflection of the Franciscan side of him which was very evident throughout his existence.

His numerous friends seem to have formed a warm and fraternal circle around this ultra-sensitive being. A separation, however brief, for a birth, a marriage, or a trial such as sickness or bereavement, left Frederic emotionally overwhelmed by the event. He was convinced that *"God has made our soul in such a way that we need two things: we need parents who cherish us, but we also need friends who are attached to us. The affection that springs from blood ties and that which comes from friendship are two pleasures which are indispensable to us and which are mutually irreplaceable"*.

He wrote to Henry Pessonneaux: *"I have the agreeable habit of identifying myself with my friends, of making them into my second family, surrounding myself with them in order to fill the vacuums which misfortune creates in my life"*. And to Prosper Dugas, ten years later: *"I have never been able to do without my friends"*.

Frederic's oldest and longest lasting friendships, and perhaps the more endearing because they went back to his childhood, were those with his friends from Lyon. At the top of the list were his two cousins Henry Pessonneaux and Ernest Falconnet.

In Frederic's heart, his first playmates on the slopes of the Croix-Rousse, such as Pierre Balloffet, held the same place as his college friends: Joseph Arthaud, Prosper Dugas, Auguste Materne, Hippolyte Fortoul (future minister of Napoleon III), Armand Chaurand, Louis Janmot, Antoine Bouchacout. When he first settled in Paris, he met several of these old friends again in the colony of Lyon natives in the Latin Quarter, along with many new ones.

Frederic kept up a regular and hearty correspondence with his friends from Lyon. In the homes of Andre-Marie or Charles Montalembert, he also struck up new friendships with other young men from the province. On March 19th 1833, he told Ernest Falconnet: *"There are about ten of us, united even more closely by the bonds of the spirit and the heart. We form a sort of literary and chivalrous band of devoted friends who have no secrets and*

open up their souls to each other in turn, to share their joys, their hopes and their sorrows". He recalled in his letters the endless evenings of discussion and exchange of views that took place in the moonlight close to the Pantheon.

Family Love

Frederic manifested an extraordinary affection for his father and his mother. Their deaths distressed him, and he expressed this in very moving terms. The day after his father's death, in 1837, he confided to Ernest Falconnet : *"What solitude on earth from now on! What emptiness all around us! It is like being lost in the crowd without someone to look out for me, and without any hands stretched out to protect one. I've lived 24 years under his shadowed protection and now I suddenly find myself without the shelter from the storm. The family oracle has become quiet, our guardian angel has become invisible. Perhaps it is possible to encounter greater affliction than this, but never such comparable grief!"*

The death of his mother, in 1839, further increased his suffering. He wrote to Edouard Reverdy: *"Oh my friend, we are orphans! What tears and sobbing! Seemingly our age ought to render my elder brother (Alphonse) and I more confident and courageous, but we lived our family life so intensely, we were so comfortable under our mother's wing, that in spirit we had never really left the nest where we were born..."*

Frederic transferred his affection to his parents-in-law, whom he called in his letters "My good father, my beloved mother". After having hesitated for rather a long time to commit himself to marriage, he took, as his wife Amélie Soulacroix, the daughter of the rector of the Lyon Academy, on June 23rd 1841, in Lyon,. This event and then the birth of their daughter Marie, on July 25th 1845, matured and transformed the man. Ozanam became less anxious and withdrawn and more open.

This transformation was such that Frederic does not appear as an "ascetic" saint, but as a Christian in whom conjugal love and fatherhood brought forth new reserves of affection and care for others. When he spoke of his wife and daughter, it was in terms which are very real to us. Here he is, for example, describing the difficult birth of his daughter, Marie: *"My dear friend, one day you will experience the same emotion after several hours of terrible pains you hear the last cry of the mother and the first cry of the newborn child, then suddenly you see a tiny creature appear, that immortal creature of whom one becomes the guardian. At that moment something terrible and yet supremely sweet occurs in the depths of the soul, not in the metaphorical sense but in a real, physical sense. One feels as if the hand of God is remodelling one inwardly and shaping a new heart within..."*

He called Amélie, whose heart was so in tune with his own "my beloved", "my dearly beloved", and "my beautiful and cherished soul". When she was absent or he himself was far from her, Frederic sent her letters with a tenderness tinged with nostalgia. For example, in July 1844: *"My beloved, I awaited your dear letter this morning with eager hope. You don't say whether you slept well, and whether your sickness was more serious than usual. How are your poor eyes? Can you tell me in your next letter?"*

From time to time, he expressed himself in poems. It was not by chance that this romantic writer so enamoured of Italy took a keen interest in the Franciscan poets of 13th century Italy. His correspondence, which was never trite, was full of colourful and accurate description of the towns and countries he visited and the scenery and monuments that impressed him. There was always a warm, personal note to these descriptions. His pen

made the mountains, the sea, Florence, Pisa, Rome, Burgos, Biarritz come alive, and seemed to be one in harmony with the genius of man and the grandeur of God.

A Christian Prophet

Frederic Ozanam's Charisma

According to the Bible, a prophet is one inspired by God who speaks out with powerful, disturbing words in times of difficulty, distress or upheaval. These words are capable of giving hope, while, at the same time, making people think.

A clear consciousness of his vocation

In this sense, one can readily consider that Frederic was a Christian prophet. As he asserted in a letter to Ernest Falconnet, in 1834: *"Religious ideas can have no value whatever if they are not practical and positive. Religion is meant for acting more than thinking"*. As a young man, Frederic always felt that he had a specific mission which impelled him to be more of an extrovert and get involved with the world and those who lived in it. He felt an obligation to make available to them the light and strength that God had bestowed upon him despite his unworthiness. He was 18 years old when he admitted to his friend Fortoul: *"When my eyes look upon society, the incredible variety of events arouse all sorts of feelings within me... and these reflections fill me with a sort of excitement. I tell myself that the spectacle that we are watching is great, and that it is wonderful to witness such a momentous era. How serious and important is the mission of a young man in society today. I rejoice in the fact that I was born in an epoch in which I will perhaps find many ways to do good, and I feel a new enthusiasm for the task."*

To be committed to this regeneration project of society, illegitimate offspring of the "Lumières", it is necessary for young Christians to have an enthusiastic heart and a well-tempered armour. Without presenting himself as a model, Frederic is aware of being driven, by grace, to the point where he could never doubt the force of his vocation. (Marcel Vincent).

A robust and radiant faith

Having rediscovered his own faith, Frederic dreamed of a true renewal in Catholicism: *"which would be filled with youth and strength, rising up suddenly over the world, to give this century a new lease of life and lead it towards civilization and happiness"*. After the 1830 revolution and the accession of the Bourgeois King, this dream seemed unfounded, even utopian. Yet in Frederic this vision originated in a clarity of mind whose secret and strength lay in a renewed Christian faith.

In this heart nothing could block out the light. In a letter to Charles Hommais, in 1852, he declared: *"I am far more deeply convinced by the 'interior evidence' of Christianity. By this I mean the daily experience which in my middle age has allowed me to find the means of sanctifying the joy of family life, and also all the consolation I need in sorrow."*

It is in this same letter that a famous phrase is to be found: *"We have two lives – one for seeking the truth and the other for putting it into practice"*. In a period of disbelief in which the institution of the Church was scorned, Frederic's solidly anchored faith blossomed quite naturally at the heart of the Church – "my Church" as he liked to call it. For him this Church could be none other than the Holy Roman Catholic Church, in which he had been baptized, brought up and educated. In his eyes, this Church had the supreme advantage of having a Pontiff at its head whose authority is a reflection of God.

If he was a liberal Catholic – a Catholic who was convinced of the natural union between the Gospel, the Church and Liberty – Frederic Ozanam was also an ultramontane Roman Catholic. Like many others, he saw in Rome the beating heart and the living centre of an authentic Christianity. In 1846, a young liberal Pope, Pius IX, became Supreme Pontiff; he was determined that the papacy be the ultimate remedy for a humanity which was on the road to ruin.

Frederic's devotion to Pius IX, who received him several times in Rome, was the measure of the hope he placed in the Catholic Church.

When he spoke of the Church, it was with great fervour and enthusiasm. In 1847, he wrote to his friend Jean-Jacques Ampère, *"The Pope as I see him, is just like the greatest of his predecessors, he is invested with a profound faith in his title as Vicar of Jesus Christ and with a profound sense of his unworthiness. He lets his position as a worldly prince fade into the background, for perhaps it had been exaggerated since Julian II and Leo X and helped to arouse so much prejudice amongst us and elsewhere. And yet one sees in him, more clearly than ever, the Bishop of Rome, that paternal and selfless authority that nobody could have the heart to abhor and to which it is very difficult not to surrender."*

A courageous Commitment

Frederic's clear-sightedness, nourished by faith, was equalled only by his courage. His contemporaries did not expect to find such courage in a man whose health was fragile and who was professionally secure. It was courageous, on his part, in a Church which was then very clerical, to consider that he had a specific mission as a lay person. This courage led him to denounce the sloth of a clergy that the 1801 Concordat had tended to render less sensitive to the misfortunes of others in this world. He did not hesitate to challenge the clergy through the person of his elder brother, Father Alphonse: *"You are not carrying out your true mission. If a larger number of Christians and especially clergymen had looked after the workers in the last ten years we would be more certain of the future"*; and again: *"The priests must give up their little bourgeois parishes: their flocks are an elite in the midst of a vast population that they do not know..."*

These courageous stands, intensified by Frederic's political option for Christian Social Democracy, made many enemies for him both among the conservative Catholics and among those who adhered to a Socialism considered remote from the church. This did not prevent him from being seen as a guide, a pioneer and even as a prophet by many people of his generation. In his youth, he already acknowledged this, with his customary humility, in a letter to Ernest Falconnet (1834): *"In some respects I am surrounded by seductive temptations of all sorts. I am in demand, people argue over me, I am pushed to the forefront... because God and my education have endowed me with some tact, a degree of broad-mindedness and tolerance in my outlook. They want to make me into a sort of leader of Catholic youth in this country. A fair number of worthy young people hold me in an esteem of which I feel unworthy. However, can this combination of outer circumstances possibly be a sign of the will of God?"*

Faith and Charity

The poor: The face of Christ

In Frederic Ozanam's eyes, faith without charity had no meaning. That is why his advice turned quickly into an entreaty when he spoke to his young friends: *"The earth has*

become a chilly place. It is up to us Catholics to rekindle the flame of human warmth going out. It is up to us to recommence the great work of regeneration even if it means another era of martyrs....”

Can we remain passive in the midst of a world suffering and groaning? And as for us, my dear friend, are we going to make no attempt to be like those saints whom we love?

If we don't know how to love God, it seems that we need to see Him in order to love and we can only see God with the eyes of faith, and our faith is so weak! But men, the poor, we see them with the eyes of flesh. They are there before us and we can place our finger and hand in their wounds and the marks of the Crown of Thorns are visible on their foreheads. Thus there is no possible room for disbelief and we should fall at their feet and say to them with the apostle: “My Lord and my God, You are our Master and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred image of the God that we cannot see. Since we know not how to love him otherwise, we will love him in your people.”

These admirable words are the echo of those of Saint Vincent de Paul, the saint whose birthplace was in Pouy in the Landes area. This was the object of Frederic's last pilgrimage in 1852. This saint became the model and protector of the Conference of Charity of which Frederic Ozanam was the principal founder in 1833. It was to blossom in the context of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Charity: The Daughter of Faith

Frederic was always ready to defend and glorify the Catholic Faith. This is why, with a group of students who shared his faith with him, in 1833 he went to see the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr. de Quélen, to suggest that the archbishop organize, for the general public and the young in particular, a series of powerful and convincing lectures in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. After two years of negotiation, Father Henry Lacordaire immediately made the “Conferences de Notre Dame” famous with his matchless eloquence.

For his part, Emmanuel Bailly gathered together in the Place Estrapade a literary circle or “Conference of History” open to young people of all convictions. Ozanam took part in it; he drew recognition because of his qualities and because he did not hesitate to stand up against opposing beliefs. He bore, with difficulty, the criticism that the Conference of History was merely a talking shop exchanging empty words that led nowhere. This inspired him to start the “Conference of Charity” which would show unbelievers that the Christian faith is naturally active, and also a means of sanctification for its members.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

On April 23rd 1833, Frederic's birthday, the first meeting took place at 18 rue du Petit-Bourbon Saint-Sulpice, in the office of the “La Tribune Catholique” newspaper of which Emmanuel Bailly was the chief editor. He had gathered around him six students aged between 19 and 23: François Lallier, Frederic Ozanam, Jules Devaux, Felix Clave, Auguste le Taillandier, Paul Lamanche.

This small group of young men placed itself less than a year later under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul whose spirit and example inspired them. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul had come into being.

Its first president was Emmanuel Bailly, but its most symbolic figure was Frederic Ozanam, owing to his influence and activity. He always refused, however, to be considered as “the”

founder of a society which, according to him *“it should neither be a political party, nor a school, nor a brotherhood... but profoundly Catholic at the same time as being secular.”*

It was then that the providential meeting took place between the pioneers of the Conference of Charity and the famous Daughter of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Sister Rosalie Rendu, “mother of an entire people” of the destitute neighbourhood of the rue Mouffetard, Saint Marceau suburb, next to the Church Saint-Etienne du Mont, where the first Conference was founded.

Sister Rosalie grasped the vocation of these enthusiastic and generous young people. She led them to the poor and taught them how to serve them with love and respect in the most authentic tradition of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Always concerned not to make his presence felt, Frederic became a member of the General Council of the Society and in 1844, with Cornudet, Vice-President General. However, he was never to become General President, except temporarily after the uprisings of June 1848, during which the President Adolphe Baudon was wounded.

He took advantage of this temporary term to evoke the requirements of charity: discretion, tact, respect for a person’s dignity, the avoidance of all misplaced proselytising. *“Let us only introduce religion into our conversation when it comes up naturally...”*

“It is to be feared that an overzealous desire to convert people merely produces hypocrites”. In Frederic Ozanam’s eyes, visiting the poor in their homes, an indispensable task of the members, should be carried out in a spirit of humility.

From 1836 to the end of 1837, Frederic led the only Conference in Lyon, which decided to divide into two Conferences that same year. A special council was thereby formed and placed under his presidency, until 1839, when Joseph Arthaud replaced him.

Tirelessly devoted to his cause, Frederic, in addition to visiting the poor, also included in his activities assisting people of different nationalities who passed through the town, giving religious instruction to children and evangelising the military. This did not prevent him from following very closely the general running of the Society, sending progress reports destined for the General Assemblies, suggesting that an Annual Report be drafted in Paris by the General Secretary, and giving judicious advice such as the following: *“Don’t make yourself visible, but let others see you”*, for he loathed ostentation, he detested secrecy.

Back in Paris, after his wedding in 1841, Frederic continued to give generously of his time to the Society, sharing with his wife Amélie his ardent love for the destitute. When he went abroad or travelled to the provinces for health or professional reasons, he made a point of going to the meetings of the local Conferences.

Almost every year, with the affection characteristic of him, he evoked the “humble beginnings” of the Conference of Charity grouped around Bailly. He marvelled at how a mere shrub had become a tall tree.

Ozanam wrote in 1841: *“The first Conference was formed in Paris eight years ago. There were seven of us, today there are more than 2,000 young people...”*. And in 1845: *“This Society, founded 12 years ago by eight humble young people now consists of 10,000*

members in 133 towns; it has started in England, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, Italy..."

In Frederic's short but intense life, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul occupied a place of honour. He always spoke of it with love. When in 1847, as Vice-President, he announced the resignation of the President Jules Gossin, and suggested that the presidents of the various Conferences elect Adolphe Baudon, his description of the Society was laden with emotion: "It is a Catholic but secular Society, humble but plentiful, poor but charged with consolation of the poor, above all in an era when charitable organizations have such a great mission to fulfil in the awakening of faith, the support of the Church and the appeasement of the hatreds which divide mankind."

Faith and Science

A Thirst for culture

Frederic Ozanam was a scholar in the full sense of the Word. His thirst for knowledge was however inseparable from his wish that it serve Christian Truth, and still better, that it demonstrates the natural union between Faith and Science.

Frederic followed courses in chemistry and botany at the Jardin des Plantes. He learned Sanskrit in order to decipher the sacred texts of the Hindus. He devoured, along with the Christian apologist, works of Bonald, Maistre, Ballanche, Görres or Baader, other works of a more materialistic nature, although he disdained fashionable novels and melodramas. All this was in view of realizing the dream of his adolescence: "*demonstrating the truth of Catholic religion through the antiquity of historic, religious and moral beliefs.*"

At the age of 20, in the context of the "Conference of History", which was the prelude to the "Conference of Charity", he was already admired for his ability to handle subjects as difficult as mythology in general, religion of Confucius and LaoTseu, the religious philosophy of India and Buddha's reform.

One can go back even further to 1830, when at the age of 17, he explained the beginnings of his work in the "Abeille française", founded in Lyon by Legeay and Father Noirod. There he published in 5 parts a study on "*The Truth of Christian Religion*" which he demonstrated by harmony of all beliefs. The same year he wrote poems about Joan of Arc (under the pseudonym of Manazo, an anagram of Ozanam), and a poem in Latin verse on the capture of Jerusalem by Titus. In 1831, he published various studies on language and thought, the philosophy of language and its effect on society, and, again, a remarkable article which appeared in the Lyon newspaper "Le Précurseur", entitled "*Reflection on the Doctrine of Saint – Simon*"

In 1836, Frederic defended his dissertations as Doctor in Law, one in Latin (De interdictis) and the other in French (On Possessive Actions). After this, he specialized more and more in Arts and History. At the age of 24, he already was recognized as one of the best experts on Dante and the Divine Comedy. While teaching a course in Commercial Law in Lyon, he wrote several articles in "L'Univers", one of which was "Protestantism and its Relationship with Liberty." (1838)

In 1839, he defended two more dissertations: one in Latin: "*De frequenti apud veteres poetas heroun ad inferos descensu*", and other in French "*Essay on the Philosophy of Dante*". In 1840, he defended in Latin his dissertation for the aggregation of the Arts Faculty on "The reason for the Arrested Development of Tragedy among the Romans", and

in French on “The Historical Value of Bossuet’s Funeral Orations”, he turned toward the study of foreign literature. In a letter to Ampère, he confessed that he had a perfect command of the Italian and German languages, read English and Spanish reasonably well and knew a smattering of Oriental languages. In fact, he was capable of reading the Bible in Hebrew.

So, at the age of 27, he founded himself substitute professor to Claude Fauriel – one of the reformers of Literary History in France, in the Chair of Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne.

On the death of his master and friend in 1844, Frederic succeeded him and occupied the Chair, which was quite in keeping with his deepest desires. He wrote to Jean-Jacques Ampère, in 1840, that the “*secret undertaking*” closest to his heart was the in-depth comparative study of the Italian and German civilizations, with the perspective of a comparative “noble study”: “*Rome and the Barbarians*”, “*The Priesthood and the Empire*”, “*Dante and the Nibelungen*”, “*Tomás de Aquino and Albertt*”, “*Galileu and Leibniz*”.

This erudition was paralleled by his exacting teaching methods. When he chose “*Nibelungen*”, as the subject of his first lectures, he felt bound to do so from Germany. From Mainz, he wrote on October 14th 1840, that for him it was a matter of “*literary conscience*”. At the end of his short life, when he was ill and the weather conditions were deplorable, he went to Spain to complete his research on Medieval Hispanic Culture. On his last trip to Italy, from which he returned only to die, he was motivated by extensive research into origins of the Italian Republics at the Pisa Library. Like Fauriel, Frederic Ozanam was in search of a universal truth. His interests were as wide-ranging as the Oriental sources of Dante’s thought and the sources of Avicenne and Averroes’ thought.

But in his mind this certainty was ever-present: The Church had assimilated the heritage of the Antiquity and Barbarian paganism. This universal vision, combined with his great openness toward others, gained him an international audience and vocation. It also enabled him to remain closely linked with his Society of Saint Vincent de Paul: whether he was in Paris, Geneva, London, or Livorno, he visited the Conferences there, and his warm presence gave them extra courage.

Like all the professors and scholars who are worthy of their scientific vocation, Frederic dreamed of an immense work in which he would invest the best of himself. In his own words, it was to be “*something very great*”: a demonstration of “*how Christianity had civilized the Barbarians with its teaching and communicated to them the heritage of Antiquity, thus creating through religious and political life the art, philosophy and literature of the Middle Ages.*”

The book was called “*A History of Christian Civilization among the Germanic peoples*” (*before and under Roman domination*) and “*The establishment of Christianity in Germany*”, and the second volume containing “*The State*” or “*The Building of the Empire from Charlemagne to Hohenstaufen*” and “*The Arts*”, with the formation of the monastic schools and the flowering of ecclesiastical literature.

This first volume was almost completed in the Summer of 1846, when he fell ill and left for Italy in search of documents on the culture of the Italian peninsula between the 7th and 10th centuries. On his return, thanks to the devoted attention of Ampère, this first volume appeared in 1847. The second volume, started in 1848, was drafted amidst all the political commotion and at the expense of a superhuman effort. Under the common title of

"Germanic Studies", the two volumes were published in Paris in 1849 and were awarded the Grand Prix Gobert of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.

Frederic did not stop there. He dreamed of a "*a vast fresco, which would embrace the history of civilization from the Barbarian period to Dante.*" The first milestone was the publication in 1850 of "*Unpublished Documents for Use in the Literary History of Italy from the 8th to the 13th centuries.*" His articles were gathered into one volume called "*Franciscan Poets in Italy in the 13th century*" and his lectures on "*Civilization in the 5th century*" were published in two volumes after his death.

The Teaching Profession Seen as a Priesthood

During all this time, Ozanam also carried out the humble tasks of any teacher: the grading of exams papers, the long preparation of lectures, the fatigue of public speaking. However, he was rewarded by the respect given to him by the large number of students in his classes who were so sensitive to his scholarship, his conscientiousness, his charity, and also his eloquence. He acquired this eloquence only after mastering his shyness; his work as an attorney had almost certainly helped. However, his eloquence issued forth from the profound enthusiasm of a man who was communicating his science and his faith.

One story illustrates this: in 1852, on the day after Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat, the Sorbonne was on the brink of a riot. The rumour went about that the professors refused to continue lecturing. Although he was seriously ill, Frederic Ozanam went to the faculty, and in front of the dumbfounded students, he delivered this admirable speech: "*Sirs, people blame our century for being too egoistical, and it is said that the teachers have also been contaminated by the general epidemic. Yet it is here that we ruin our health. It is here that we use up all our strength. I am not complaining.*

Our lives, my life, belong to you, we owe you our lives until the last gasp and you will get them. For my part, Sirs, if I die, it will be serving you".

He maintained a similar attitude with his colleagues at the Sorbonne: an attitude of esteem and respect. While witnessing to his Christian faith, he accepted that certain colleagues did not share his views or were even non-believers. On this subject he wrote: "*Those who doubt are great in number. We owe a compassion which does not exclude esteem.*"

Faith and Democracy

After the 1830 Revolution, Frederic Ozanam declared himself a liberal Catholic, that is to say, a believer, who while remaining a loving and obedient son of the Church, considered that the principles of 1789 Revolution (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) were a modern version of the spirit of the Gospel. His mentor was Felicite de Lamennais, a Breton priest with prophetic intuition, but when he left the Church, Frederic left him.

The Alliance between Catholicism and Liberty

In Lyon, where Lamennais had many partisans, the young Frederic read "L'Avenir", eagerly supporting enthusiastically the political and prophetic theories of its editors: Lamennais, Montalembert, Lacordaire, Gerbet.

There was a great moment of happiness when in "L'Avenir" of August 24th 1831, Frederic found a very laudatory review written by Lamennais of Frederic's own essay "*Exposition of the Doctrine of Saint Simon*". The master applauded the young writer from Lyon as someone who "from the outset" had situated himself in "the 19th century intellectual

scene” and “had blended the accents of a noble soul, full of life and rich in hope” into a philosophical discussion.

In January 1832, Frederic Ozanam attended the lectures of father Gerbet, on the Philosophy of History. These strengthened his sense of the Church, sustaining it and clarifying it with an expanded vision of a world which the Church, in turn, must sanctify through its action.

On February 10th of the same year, he expressed his enthusiasm to Ernest Facolnnet: “*Lamennais’ system is the immortal alliance of faith and science, of charity and industry of power and liberty. Applied to history, throws new light on it, it uncovers in it the destiny of the future.*”

The Hope of Regeneration Through Democracy

During the July Monarchy (1830 – 48) – a regime whose egotistical conservatism he deplored – Frederic did not abandon the dream and vision that he had chosen in 1830. His correspondence was full of powerful remarks like the following, dated July 21st 1834: “*I think that in the face of power, the sacred principle of liberty is also necessary. I think that one must utter a warning with a severe and courageous voice to the power that exploits instead of sacrificing itself. Words are made to be a barrier that is used to resist force; they are the grains of sand on which waves of the sea are broken.*”

Frederic Ozanam was fully aware that such attitudes gave rise to estrangement and displeasure. It should be specified that at that time the Archbishop of Paris was Archbishop Quelen, a prelate who was extremely attached to the old regime, whereas Monsignor Affre, who succeeded him, was in complete harmony with Ozanam’s ideas.

Frederic was struck by the lack of vitality, if not indifference of so many believers who did not seem to sense the fundamental upheaval brewing in society. As New Year 1848 approached, which Frederic sensed was to be of capital importance, he returned from Rome filled with admiration for all that he had seen. He wanted all French Catholics to turn Pius IX who, according to him was not only the liberator of Italy, but also the Pope who was going to seal the new alliance between religion and liberty, Christianity and Democracy, in the likeness of the agreement concluded in the past between the Church and the Barbarians.

Let us devote our time to the Barbarians

It was in this perspective that Frederic entered into politics by writing an article in “Le Correspondant” on February 10th 1848, an article in which he demonstrated the possible analogy between the conversion of the Barbarians to Christianity between the 6th and the 9th centuries and the conversion that led Rome to turn toward the masses in 1848. He wrote: “*They are precious to the Church because of their number, the infinite number of souls to be won over and saved, and also because of the poverty that God loves and because of their work in which their strength lies*”. He concluded with this cry: “*Let us devote our time to the Barbarians!*”

This phrase caught on. But it also frightened people, because in the eyes of many Christians, the working classes were also the dangerous classes. Moreover, people did not hesitate to say it to Frederic Ozanam, who explained himself in a letter to his friend Teophile Foisset: “*By saying: let us devote our time to the Barbarians, I am asking that we do as he has done (The Pope Pius IX) , I am asking that, instead of embracing the interests*

of a doctrinaire ministry, of a frightened peerage, or an egotistical bourgeoisie, we look after the people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who demand with a reason a fuller share of public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty... It is in the people that I can see enough faith and morality left to save a society whose higher classes are lost..."

He repeated this a month later to his brother, Alphonse, as the Second Republic, whose advent he hailed with enthusiasm, was founded: "The alliance between the Catholics and the vanquished bourgeoisie is a bad one. It is more sensible to rely on the people who are the true ally of the Church, though poor, and as devoted to the cause as the Church is, and blessed in the same way with all the blessings of the Saviour."

The encyclical "Rerum Novarum" on the position of working people, published on May 15th 1891 by Pope Leo XII, often seems to echo the premonitory social thought of Frederic Ozanam which was so generous and fraternal. He was preoccupied by injustice, inequality, the dignity of work, just wages, fair taxes, the right of ownership, and the alleviation of the suffering of those who were least favoured.

These ideas were further taken up in the encyclicals "Quadragesimo anno" of Pius XI, in 1931, and "Centesimus annus" of John Paul II, in 1991.

"The New Era" - Political Commitment

Frederic had no natural taste, nor any particular competence for politics. However, he agreed under pressure from his friends, but without any illusions, to run in the election in the Rhone department as a candidate for a seat in the National Assembly. This was to be elected by universal suffrage for the first time.

He defended the setting up of institutions that would improve and renew the position of the workers.

Frederic was not elected, but this defeat barely affected him; his future political activity would be confined to his articles in editions of "Nouvelle Ere". He was reunited with other liberal Catholics such as Lacordaire and the Father Henry Maret.

The newspaper was launched on April 15th 1848 and was reminiscent of Lamennais's "L'Avenir", in its modernity, the sort of underlying jubilation in all its articles, and in its fidelity to the principles of liberty. Its non-conformism irritated the majority of Catholics who were more sensitive to Louis Veuillot's invectives in "L'Univers". The latter considered Frederic Ozanam as the leader of "the party of love" made up of "rabid sheep".

During the workers' uprising of June 1848, Frederic showed a compassion and understanding toward the insurgents contrasting sharply with the fierceness of too many people who called themselves Christians.

Frederic's Newspaper "Nouvelle Ere", ran into financial difficulties; its very existence was in danger. On April 5th 1849, the paper was sold. This was a serious setback for Christian Democracy. It excluded the most clear-sighted minds from the struggle: Ozanam and Maret in particular.

In December 1852 came Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat, which was applauded by the

majority of Catholics. Even though Frederic Ozanam deplored this defeat for the cause of liberty, he did not despair. On the contrary, in a letter to Foisset, on September 24th 1848, he reasserted his conviction: *"I believed, I still believe that Christian Democracy is possible. I can even say that I believe in nothing else as far as politics are concerned."*

Faith and Social Justice

The Christians and the People

Frederic Ozanam was sensitive to the social question, which, in the 19th century essentially centred on the position of the social workers. The social upheavals in Paris and Lyon and the consequences of the Revolution brought the workers' position to light even more clearly.

In 1836, when the Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul was starting to grow, he wrote to Falconnet: *"We are too young to intervene in the social struggle. Are we then to remain passive in a world which is suffering and groaning? No, a preparatory path is open to us. Before doing public good, we can try to do good to a rare few. Before regenerating France we can give relief to a few of her poor."*

He found himself more and more ill at ease in a political regime whose motto, destined only for the ruling classes, seemed to be "Get Rich!". This was all the more true since the government of the July Monarchy did nothing to provide adequate social legislation. They went no further than the liberalism of the 1791 upper and middle classes.

It was the approach and the explosion of the Revolution of February 1848 that caused Frederic to become a key figure in a committed social Catholicism.

If the liberal Catholics of the time were very timid in social matters. Frederic Ozanam stood out through his daring, which even frightened some of his friends. An example of this was his famous article of February 10th 1848, in "Le Correspondant" in which he invited all French Catholics finally to give their attention to people and their needs.

Justice and Charity

In fact, the political and social thought of Frederic Ozanam was far less that of a theorist than that of a Christian living his faith deeply. This was the spirit of the most influential of all the original members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Frederic wished to give his Church a face of fraternity and make her attentive to all forms of poverty in order to obliterate poverty both spiritually and materially. Few liberal Catholics linked their personal religion with their social pre-occupations to this extent.

On many occasions, Frederic asked of his correspondents for their social spirit prevail over their convictions and political theories. He longed to unite, in view of the relief of countless forms of poverty, all those who were striving towards a world that was more conducive to solidarity. In his mind, Christians should place themselves in the forefront. Since their religion itself was based on brotherhood and a spirit of sacrifice.

When he demanded equality, that is, social justice, Frederic took good care not to oppose it to Christian Charity. In his eyes these two principles, far from nullified each other: *"The order of society is based on two virtues: justice and charity. However, justice presupposed a lot of love already, for one needs to love a man a great deal in order to respect his rights. These which limit our rights, and his liberty, which hampers our liberty. Justice has its limits*

whereas charity knows none..”

Sentence from one of his lectures in Commercial law echoes this thought: *“Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice’s role to prevent the attacks.”*

Farewell to Life

As early as 1845 – at the age of 32 – Frederic Ozanam voiced his concern about the various palpitations he was experiencing; he attributed them to utter exhaustion. He was advised to reduce the number of his activities, but to no avail.

The years of 1846 and 1847 did bring him some respite. He left on vacation to Meudon, but overworking in the following years of 1848 and 1849 drained the strength that he had regained: haemorrhages and back pains were a further cause for worry. Long weeks of rest in Ferney only brought a precarious recovery. The day before he returned to Paris, on November 3rd 1849, he consulted Dr. Joseph Arthaud, his friend from Lyon: *“I am demoralized; give me fresh heart. Tell me if I can start work again, and to what extent. Tell me, must I behave like a man who can still count a little on his strength in the future, or must I tighten the sails and think of nothing more but providing for my loved ones, like a father of a family threatened with premature disability? Pray for me so that God does not wish me to serve him by working, I resign myself to serving him by suffering...”*

This was painful for a man who was so young. There was life with its difficulties for sure, but it also had its joys. Little by little, however, this Christian who was steeped in faith began to grasp what was the will of God: the last phase of his existence would be marked by the ordeal of suffering. From that moment, in 1849, Frederic’s spiritual ascent became more and more pronounced.

The year of 1850 went by without too much difficulty. But the effects of the illness which were to carry him off became more and more frequent and painful. He was suffering from chronic nephritis. Another stay in Brittany brought about a fairly long remission.

But the illness progressed further; a serious attack of pleurisy put his life in danger.

Knowing Frederic’s great affection for Italy and anxious to alleviate the worries about his health, Hippolyte Fortoul, Minister of State Education, who was from Lyon, entrusted Frederic with a mission. This mission was to last until May 1st 1853; its purpose was the study of the origins of the Italian villages from the 8th century onward. After travelling through Biarritz, Bayonne and Dax, Frederic stopped in Marseille before sailing for Genoa and Livorno. The crossing was very difficult and, during their stay in Italy, the weather was atrocious.

Frederic settled on January 10th 1853 in Pisa with Amélie and Marie. He felt his health deteriorating. He went through a phase of discouragement and then resignation, but this did not prevent him from continuing his historical research and contributing to the growth of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in the peninsula.

The Bevilacqua brothers offered him hospitality in their charming home in Antiguano, near Livorno, but the pain worsened and intensified Frederic’s melancholic mood. This did not prevent him from having the courage to exclaim before the end of his stay: *“My God! I thank you for the suffering and affliction that you have sent me in this home...”*

In August, Frederic's two brothers, Father Alphonse and Doctor Charles, to whom the sick man had sent calls for help, hurried to his side. This only reinforced the realization that unfortunately there was nothing to be done. It was Frederic's desire that he die in his homeland.

On September 2nd 1853, after an exhausting crossing, the Ozanam party landed in Marseille. They settled in an apartment on Rue Mazade, no. 9.

Calm and serene, he received the last sacrament on September 5th. To the Priest who assisted him he said: "*Why would I fear Him? I love Him so much.*"

On September 8th, the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, around 7:30 at night, Frederic Ozanam committed his soul to God, saying "My Lord, have mercy". And 20 minutes later he gave his last breath.

In his will, Frederic Ozanam asked the family and friends to pray for his soul. In answering his demand, a religious service was held in Marseille, and another one in Lyon, in the Church of Saint Peter, where he had his first communion, and then in Paris, in the Church of Saint Sulpice, not far away from the location where he had founded his beloved Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

His wife, Amélie, wanted her husband to be buried at a church. The urn was deposited, provisionally in the crypt of the Church of Saint Joseph of the Carmelite, today frequented by the students of the Catholic Institute of Paris, street of Vaugirard, no. 70.

Supported by the Prior of the Dominicans and by Father Henry Lacordaire, Amélie Ozanam obtained the verbal and official authorization of the Minister of Cults, Mr. Fortoul, a school friend of Frederic's, to leave the urn permanently there. There a crypt was made and a small chapel built in the style of the catacomb mortuaries.

In 1913, for occasion of the celebrations of the centennial of Frederic's birth, a new grave was erected. There, he rests, since June 1929, when the canonical exhumation was carried out, as part of the beatification.

In 1853, year of the centennial of his death, the French artist, René Dionnet painted the Good Samaritan fresco, decorating the wall behind the grave, and symbolizing the love for one's neighbour which encouraged the life of such an authentic testimony to charity that was the life of Frederic Ozanam.

Hymn To the Lord

What more significant conclusion could one give to this panoramic biography of the human and spiritual journey of Frederic Ozanam, than an invitation to the reader to meditate on his marvellous farewell to life on earth? It was a last act of faith, hope and charity, opening up onto the light of eternity.

"As at the beginning of the Canticle of Ezechias: I don't know if God will permit me to carry it through to the end. I know that today I have reached my fortieth year, more than a half of a life. I know that I have a young and beloved wife and enchanting child, excellent brother, a second mother, many friends, an honourable career; my research has in fact reached the point that it could serve as the basis of a book of which I have dreamed for a

long time. Yet here I am struck down by a serious and persistent illness that is all the more dangerous for the fact that it is probably underlain by total exhaustion.

Must I then leave all these goods that you yourself have given me, my God? Lord will you not be content with only a part of the sacrifice? Which of my disordered affections must I sacrifice to you? Would you not accept the holocaust of my literary pride, of my academic ambitions, or even of my research plans in which perhaps was contained more pride than zeal for the truth? If I sold part of my books in order to give the proceeds to the poor, and limited myself to carrying out the duties of my state of life, of if I devoted the rest of my life to visiting the poor, and educating trainees and soldiers, would you be satisfied Lord? Would you allow me the pleasure of living through to old age with my wife and completing the education of my child? Perhaps, my God, that is not your will at all. You don't accept these self-interested offerings; you reject my holocausts and sacrifices!

It is written at the beginning of the book that I must do your will and I have said: here I am, Lord. I am answering your call and I have no reason to complain. You have given me forty years of life. If I put before you the years I have lived with bitterness, I see it is because of the sins with which I ruined them. Yet when I consider the graces with which you have enriched them, I again go over these years in your presence with gratitude, Lord.

When you chain me to my bed for what is left of my life there will not be enough time to thank you for all the time I have lived. Ah! If these pages are the last that I am writing, may they be a hymn to your goodness."

Pisa, April 23rd 1853 on his 40th birthday

A beatification achieved by popular demand

This brief biography of Frederic Ozanam could not cover all the facets of his astonishing personality. Yet, no doubt, it is sufficient to read and hear once more the warm words of Pope John Paul II during the audience he was gracious enough to give on April 27th 1983 to the Vincentians from all over the world who came to Rome for the celebrating marking a century and a half of activity in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

It is exactly 150 years since the first "Conference of Charity" saw the day in Paris on the initiative of young lay Christians grouped around Frederic Ozanam. We must above all than God for the gift he made to the Church in the person of Frederic Ozanam. One marvels at all that this student, teacher and father of a family undertook in his life, which was burnt out too fast, for the Church, for society and for the poor, as a man of ardent faith and resourceful charity. His name remains associated with that of Saint Vincent de Paul who had founded the Daughters of Charity two centuries earlier without the equivalent Order having yet been instituted for men. How can one prevent oneself wishing that the Church also place Ozanam in the ranks of the Blessed and the Saints?

The Holy Father's wish, which echoed our own, has at last been granted after 72 years of patient and fervent waiting.

After having been proclaimed Frederic "Venerable", on July 6th 1993, John Paul II invited all Vincentians to Paris for Frederic Ozanam's beatification on August 22nd 1997.

The Ozanam Miracle

Since the introduction of the cause of the beatification of Frederic Ozanam, March 15th

1925, the feat of St. Louise de Marillac, members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul have been imploring the Lord for evidence of the sanctity of their principal founder. A special prayer they recited included the words, "to manifest by heavenly favours", fitting words for their supplication!

Generations of Vincentians have recited the prayers for Ozanam's beatification at their Conference meetings and assemblies in order to obtain the graces and, especially, the necessary miracles which would result in the process of the beatification.

The first miracle was not long in coming: February 2nd 1926, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. A little Brazilian of eighteen months, Fernando Luis Benedito Ottoni, whose family lived in Nova Friburgo, State of Rio de Janeiro, was the beneficiary of Ozanam's intervention.

Suffering from incurable diphtheria, this child was failing fast, his parents felt completely helpless, all medicine proved ineffective.

Fernando's grandfather, a member of the Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul of the Holy Spirit, at Rio de Janeiro, asked his friends to pray for the cure of his dying grandson. They implored the intercession of Frederic Ozanam.

The very next morning, the child's illness began to subside. The family was overcome with joy as their boy's health started to improve so rapidly.

A detailed dossier, which included doctors' reports, as well as meticulous accounts of eyewitnesses, was carefully compiled and then submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. After a long period of waiting, a new impetus in the beginning of 1980 spurred on the procedure of the beatification.

The presentation of the "Desquisitio" and "Positio", elaborated at great length, successfully passed the necessary steps of the Roman Commissions of Historians, Theologians and Cardinals. On July 6th 1993, Pope John Paul II, proclaimed Frederic Ozanam "Venerable" and on June 25th 1996, he signed the degree recognizing the miracle obtained in favour of Fernando Ottoni, thus opening the process of beatification.

Source: Magazine " Ozanam - A Lay Saint for our Time " - Éditions du Signe.

Last Updated on Monday, 02 March 2009 14:37