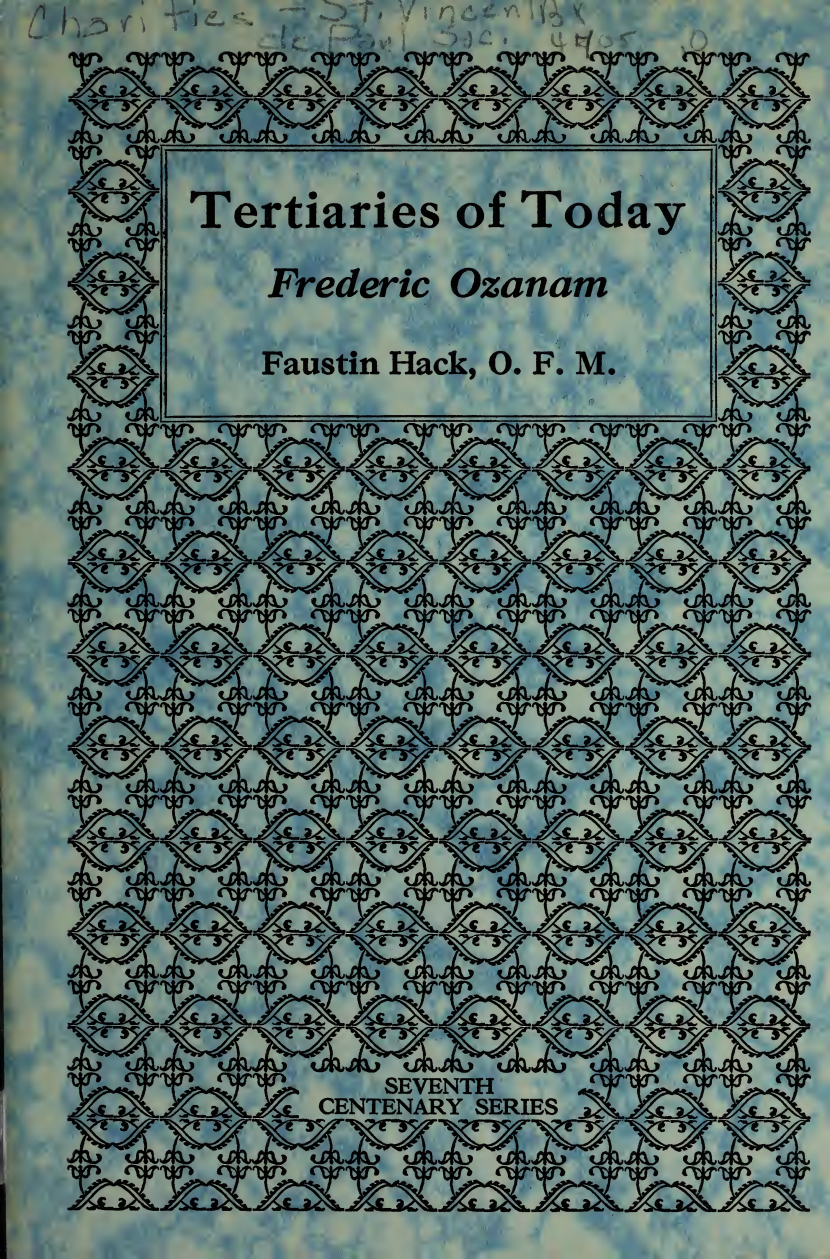


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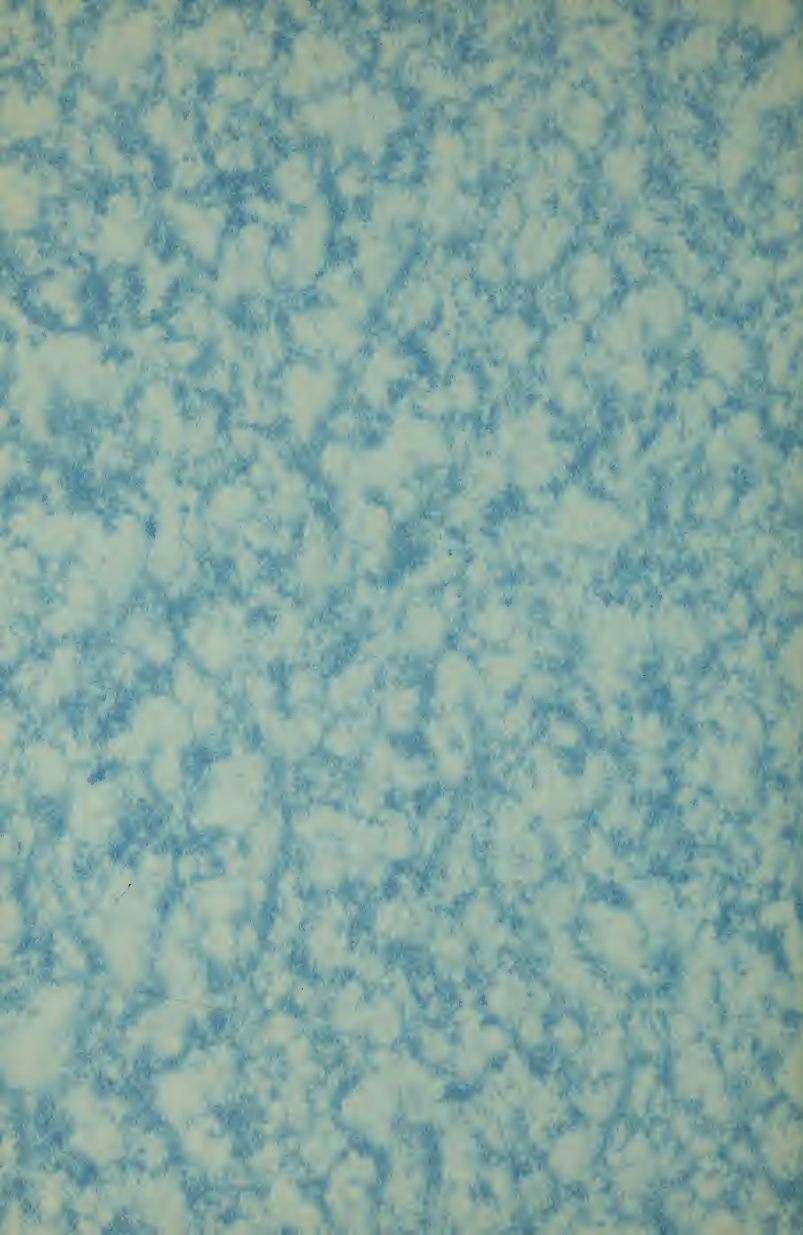


# Tertiaries of Today

*Frederic Ozanam*

Faustin Hack, O. F. M.

SEVENTH  
CENTENARY SERIES



# Frederic Ozanam

*Founder of the  
St. Vincent De Paul Society*

Faustin Hack, O. F. M.



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Frederic Ozanam, 1813-1853



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# FREDERIC OZANAM, Tertiary

*Founder of St. Vincent de Paul Society*

THE Third Order was intended by its founder, St. Francis, to be an active force in the Church of God, and this it has proved to be in the seven centuries of its existence. In every period of its history, we find Tertiaries who were able to wield a powerful, beneficial influence on their times. But what of today? What of our own modern times? Even in modern times, there are Tertiaries who have shed luster on the Order of St. Francis by their lives of sacrifice in the service of Christ and of humanity.

A Tertiary, honored and revered throughout the world as the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul—a society of laymen, dedicated to the honor of God in the service of the poor—is Frederic Ozanam. His life, though short in years, was replete with activity. It is a sermon to all Tertiaries to go and do likewise, and teaches us all the possibility of doing some good, however humble and limited our sphere may be.

## *His Noble Parents*

The Ozanams were a French family of ancient lineage, renowned for virtue and learning. For more than three centuries, every generation produced some distinguished man of science and invariably counted one, frequently several members, in the service of the sanctuary. They were of



Jewish origin, but in the seventh century became Christians.

Antoine Ozanam, the father of our hero, fought with distinction in Napoleon's Army in Italy, and when the war terminated, he returned to Lyons, France, his native city. There he married the pious daughter of a rich merchant, Marie Nantes. Shortly after his marriage, a reverse of fortune, brought about by his going security for a friend, almost ruined him, and he was compelled to seek employment as private tutor in Milan, Italy. It was here our Tertiary, Frederic Ozanam, was born, on April 13, 1813. Of the other children born to the Ozanams, only two lived to advanced years: Alphonse, who became a priest, and Charles, the physician. As private teacher Antoine Ozanam found much leisure. This he devoted to the study of medicine, and in less than two years we meet him as a physician with an extended practice. After the fall of the French Empire, Dr. Ozanam returned again to Lyons, where the fame of his medical skill had preceded him, and he soon had a host of patients. Although his fame grew and he was at the head of his profession in Lyons, Dr. Ozanam never became a rich man. Wealth was not his aim. He looked on his medical profession as a sort of priesthood; and therefore devoted his life to works of charity among the poor, whom he attended gratuitously and otherwise aided out of his meager fortune. In this pious work, he was seconded for seventeen years by his pious wife. They were both



frequently to be found in the hovels and the garrets of the poor. Familiar as he was with the rickety, broken stairs of these places, he nevertheless made a false step one day, and fell, injuring himself so severely that he died the next day. His noble wife survived him but two years. We have no proofs that these two saintly souls were members of the Third Order; but they certainly were true exponents of the spirit of St. Francis. Poor in spirit, they became all things to the poor and unfortunate. May their lives be an incentive to all Tertiaries to model their lives according to the teachings of St. Francis, in piety, poverty, and charity. What wonder that such noble persons should be the parents of the greatest apostle of charity of the nineteenth century. From them he inherited not only his solid piety but also his great love and pity for the poor and miserable. What a noble legacy to leave one's children!

### *His School Days*

At school, Frederic showed an earnestness and intelligence which gave promise of a brilliant future. At the age of eleven, he received holy Communion for the first time—in his case indeed the “Bread of the strong,” the “Fountain of life.” “O glad and blessed day,” he writes, “may my right hand wither and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if ever I forget thee.” (O’Meare, *Frederic Ozanam*.) And his biographers tell us that at the age of fourteen he composed Latin poems and at sixteen con-

tributed able articles to a periodical of Lyons, *L'abeille française*.

It was at this time, during his studies of rhetoric and philosophy, that he experienced the bitter trials of doubt and unrest, which so often afflict earnest thinking minds in youth. "The intellectual activity, which had so quickened his mental powers, suddenly kindled a flame within him, that stirred vital questions and evoked the demon of doubt, that torment of noble and active souls who hunger to believe and cannot rest until reason has justified belief." (Horgan, *Great Catholic Layman*.) Let us listen to his own account. "In a century of doubt, God gave me the grace to be born in the faith. He gave me a Christian father, a saintly mother; as my first teacher he gave me a prudent sister, pious as an angel, whom she has since joined. Later on the noise of a godless, unbelieving world reached me. I experienced all the doubts, which eat at the heart in the daytime and fill the eyes with bitter tears at night. However, the teachings and counsels of a prudent priest saved me. He brought order and light to my thoughts. From then on my faith was firm, and touched by this singular grace, I vowed to God to dedicate my life to the service of that truth, which had saved me." This priest was the Abbé Noirot, professor of philosophy at the college of Lyons, a man gifted with the happy ability of leading young men to their true vocations. Pious young man that he was, he had recourse also to prayer, and it was prayer above all that brought

him safe through the crisis. One day when the temptation was at its worst, he entered a church, and falling on his knees prayed with all the ardor of his soul to be delivered from the trial, promising that, if God gave him light to see the truth, he would forever be its champion. The prayer was heard and the vow fulfilled.

### *The Law Student*

At the age of seventeen, our Tertiary had completed his rhetorical and philosophical studies at Lyons. His father, Dr. Ozanam, had designed him for the Law, but he dreaded so much the risk of his faith and morals which would ensue from sending him so young to Paris, that he placed him as clerk in the office of a local attorney. What a beautiful example for all Catholic parents. Dr. Ozanam was willing to do everything for his dear child; but he was above all anxious that his boy should preserve his innocence and his faith.

Young Ozanam found but little pleasure in his new occupation. He devoted his spare time to the study of English, German, and Hebrew. He also found time to write timely treatises against the then prevalent evils. He was deeply grieved to observe the ever increasing indifference and irreligion among the young men of his acquaintance. Then already, to judge from his many letters, he seems to have formed the idea of an association of young men, who should be of mutual assistance and encouragement in their religious exercises and good works.

This idea was the germ from which later his Society of St. Vincent de Paul blossomed forth, enriching the whole world with the fragrance of its noble works.

*In Paris—The Champion of Catholicity*

Dr. Ozanam, after a year's trial, was so fully convinced of the earnestness and the solidity of the faith of our young Tertiary that he deemed it opportune to send his son to Paris for further studies. Thus we find Frederic, at the age of eighteen, entered as student in the famous law college of Paris, *L'Ecole de Droit*. Here he found himself thrown among young men utterly destitute of religion and of respect for its ordinances. Of the many students there only three proclaimed themselves Christians, and that in a country supposedly Catholic. At his boarding place, he was the only one who observed the Friday abstinence; for which he was often ridiculed. But he was not to be influenced by the malice and cowardice of others.

Among such associates, his naturally pious mind told him that he could not and should not make friends; and so he found himself utterly alone, a homeless, friendless stranger in a large, godless city. What wonder, that writing to his mother on November 7, 1831, he thus gives expression to his pent up feelings: "Here I am alone, without any amusements or any sort of consolation. I, so used to fire-side talks, who took so much pleasure in seeing every day around me those dear ones who love me;

I so terribly in need of advice and encouragement, behold me cast unprotected, without a rallying point of any sort, into this great capital of egotism, this vortex of human passions and errors. I have no one to pour out my heart to but you, my dearest mother, you and God; but these two are all in all to me." (O'Meara.) These words disclose to us in a beautiful way two virtues of our young Tertiary, a confident love toward God and a tender affection for his mother. May they be the characteristics of all Tertiaries. We note also in his words the truly Franciscan sentiment, expressed centuries before by our holy Father St. Francis: "My God and My All."

But God, who amply repays all loving confidence placed in him, watched over this pious young man, and led him to call upon the great professor of Mathematics at the *College de France*, M. Ampère, whom he had already met at Lyon. To him he unfolded his loneliness and misery. The venerable man, touched at this recital, proffered his home to the young student as a boarding place, which offer, upon the advice of his father, Dr. Ozanam, Frederic accepted. André Marie Ampère, was not only a learned man, but also a good Catholic. And so the young stranger was soon happy and at home. Here he came in touch with many learned men of the day, and not least of them was Chateaubriand.

The poet asked him one day whether he frequented the theaters. Frederic for a moment hesi-

tated to reply—he had promised his mother never to enter a theater—then he frankly replied that he had not and did not intend to do so. Chateaubriand warmly praised his resolve and then added, “You would gain nothing, and might lose a great deal.”

Amid the dangers surrounding him, our young Tertiary led a pure and blameless life. He had, however, interior enemies. His main besetting fault, or we should rather say temptation, was pride. His was not the foolish, repellent pride, born of ignorance and nurtured on conceit, but rather the pride peculiar to noble, highly intellectual men. His natural impulse was to design great projects, often impossible or extremely difficult of execution; and because these would not realize, or not in the manner expected by him, he would be disappointed, and he sometimes gave way to fits of discontent. In a man less prayerful or less active, these would have embittered his existence; but he fought them off by means of prayer and positive acts of charity, and by his daily conversation with M. Ampère.

Besides his law studies at the *Ecole de Droit*, Ozanam attended historical and philosophical studies at the *College de France* and at the *Sorbonne*. At these places, he found his work cut out for him. At the former, he soon noticed that the professors were accustomed to court a cheap popularity by attacks on Christianity, Revelation, and the Church. Mindful of his vow to champion the

cause of Truth, he made note of these attacks, consulted proper authorities to enable him to refute in writing the false and flippant statements, and soon he was glad to notice that the professors were more cautious in their remarks. He gathered around him a band of young Catholic men, organized them, and prepared them to hand in signed protests to their professors, whenever they felt themselves called to deny Christianity or ridicule the Church. "Our answers were publicly read," writes Ozanam himself, "and produced the best effect, both as to the professor, who as good as retracted his words, and as to the audience, who applauded. The most useful result of all this is that it enables us to show the students of the present day, that one may be a Catholic and have common sense, that we may love liberty and religion at the same time; also it stirs them up from their fatal indifference and accustoms them to grave and earnest discussion." (O'Meara.) Professor Jouffroy, one of the leading exponents of atheism and unbelief, was quite frequently called to task for his utterances, and with a happy effect—he later became a firm believer and member of the Church. "All the systems put together are not worth one page of the Catechism," were his dying words. Would that our present-day students, Tertiary or non-Tertiary, might draw a lesson from this incident. A firm stand in defense of the Church and her rights can not but draw admiration from our enemies, especially where concerted opinion is brought to bear on them. Oh, for

a few fearless, intrepid Ozanams at our secular places of learning!

A step so decisive and so bold as this could not fail to attract public attention. Numbers of Catholic young men now rallied around this gallant youth. On his return from vacation Ozanam found that the young Catholic party had need of a meeting place of its own. He found a willing friend in the person of M. Bailly, the proprietor of the *Tribune Catholique*, who placed the office of his newspaper at their disposal. M. Bailly was a very noble man, who took great interest in everything Catholic and especially in the young Catholic students, some of whom he even boarded at his home. His paper appeared three times a week, and it was sent gratis to anyone who could read it. At his office, Ozanam and his staunch followers met once a week and debated on their work after listening to a practical lecture from M. Bailly. At first, their meetings were informal and they were frequented only by Catholic students. Gradually, as interest was aroused, the other students of varying degrees of unbelief joined in the discussions. In a short time, the newspaper office became too small, and kindly M. Bailly again came to their rescue by hiring a larger hall out of his own meager means.

### *The St. Vincent de Paul Society*

The debating society grew, but Ozanam and his devoted little band of Catholic champions soon found that they were making little or no impression



on their unbelieving friends. "When we Catholics," Ozanam wrote twenty years afterwards, "sought to call attention of these wandering brothers to the marvels of Christianity, they said to us: 'Yes, you have a right to speak of the past. In bygone days Christianity did indeed work wonders, but today Christianity is dead. And you, who boast of being Catholics, what do you do? What works can you show which prove your faith and can claim to make us respect and acknowledge it?' Let us to the front! Let our deeds be in accordance with our faith! But what were we to do?" One evening after the usual debate, Ozanam left the hall with his two friends, M. Lallier and M. Lamache. On their way, they discussed means of making their meetings more productive of good. Ozanam mentioned casually in the course of the conversation that, discussing the matter with his friend, M. Letillandier, it had occurred to them that it would be best to organize a meeting where they would occupy themselves not with discussions but with good works and thus give a more practical example to their erring friends. The suggestion met with no immediate response from his two companions, but strange to say they could not rid themselves of the idea. They agreed to lay the matter before their practical friend, M. Bailly. The good man at once pronounced in favor of Ozanam and again offered his office as their meeting place.

It was in May, 1833. Ozanam and six more companions were assembled in this office at a meeting

presided over by M. Bailly. "If you intend the work to be really efficacious," M. Bailly said, "if you are in earnest about serving the poor as well as yourselves, you must not let it be a mere doling out of alms, bringing each your pittance of money or food; you must give them the alms of good advice." Ozanam regarded these words as a message from heaven. There was no room for doubt. They were to serve God in the persons of the poor, whom they were to visit at their homes and assist by every means. They formed a definite society and placed it under the protection of St. Vincent de Paul. Their rules were few but stringent. They were forbidden to discuss political or personal concerns at their meetings, which they now styled "conferences." The society was in no way to be used for personal gain. They were to be "Brothers to the poor, assisting, aiding and advising them. It was characteristic of Ozanam's inborn humility and modesty to always repudiate the title of founder of this Society of St. Vincent de Paul. "We were eight," was always his closing argument. Nevertheless the title and glory have justly clung to him, whom the others looked on as their leader and the animating spirit of their efforts.

Like the little grain of mustard seed, the society has grown to a gigantic tree, whose branches extend in blessing over the world.

"Show us your works! We admit the past grandeur of Christianity, but the tree is now dead and

bears no fruit." This was the challenge cast into the teeth of Ozanam and his stalwart band of defenders of the faith. They accepted the challenge and, as we have learned, the St. Vincent de Paul Society was their answer. It was in the year 1833, that the eight young men, under the practical guidance of M. Bailly, formed themselves into a "Conference of Charity." Later they adopted the name, "St. Vincent de Paul Society." M. Bailly, the editor of the *Tribune Catholique* was elected the first president.

### *Growth of the St. Vincent de Paul Society*

The rules adopted then are practically the same as those by which the Society is governed today. Simplicity in all its details characterizes the society. The membership is divided into three classes: active, subscribing, and honorary. The active membership is made up of Christian men who desire to unite in a communion of prayers and a participation in the same works of charity. Subscribing and honorary members are those who "cannot devote themselves to the works in which the society is engaged but who assist the active members by their influence, their offerings and their prayers." In outlining the activities of the society, the founders had an eye to the future needs of humanity and ordered that, "no work of charity should be regarded as foreign to the society, although its special object is to visit the poor families."

Mr. Mulry, of hallowed memory in the St. Vin-

cent de Paul Society, says in his treatise on the society in "The Catholic Encyclopedia": "It is plainly evident from this that the society is given the widest latitude in the selection of the works in which the members engage. There are committees in charge of fresh-air work for poor children, convalescent homes, support of day nurseries, the custody of paroled prisoners, care of homeless boys, clubs for boys, the visitation of prisoners, and the sick in the hospitals, the maintenance of chaplains for the purpose of serving Catholic inmates in public institutions, employment bureaus, the care of the immigrants, the maintenance of sailors' missions, the finding of homes for orphans and systematic inspection of their case until maturity." The spiritual note predominates throughout the work of the society. The corporal works of mercy are to precede the spiritual ones, but they are never allowed to be separated from them. The service of the poor is undertaken as a spiritual duty first and always. Another beautiful characteristic of the society is that personality features prominently in its works. The individual member is urged to exert himself personally, and much is left to his own initiative.

M. Bailly, the practical monitor of the enthusiastic young apostles of charity, directed them to Sister Rosalie, the "Poor-mother of Paris." This worthy nun supplied them, not only with a list of poor families, but provided them also with the necessary clothing and fuel for distribution among

the poor. Every week the members met to exchange ideas and experiences. The meetings were opened and concluded with prayer; also everyone was expected to contribute his mite toward defraying the expenses. It is only natural that these collections in the beginning were very meager. M. Bailly managed secretly to deposit a five-franc piece here and there as remuneration to Ozanam or one of the others, for articles they had prepared for his paper.

The little grain of mustard seed was now duly planted, and soon it began to spread out its branches into the suburbs of Paris; yes, even to the other provinces of France. The young enthusiasts were wont to introduce new conferences wherever they went to spend their vacations or to settle down for life. After two years, it was found necessary to divide the society into different councils or branches according to the territory covered. Paris remained the center of all its activity. Ozanam in his ardent zeal went from place to place organizing and stabilizing new councils. Whenever he heard of a new branch being opened in some town, he would go there and show an active interest in the work, but would never force his opinion on others, desiring that each member be allowed to act according to the dictates of his heart and not so much according to a set of stringent rules.

Today, we are happy to record, the society is to be found in every part of the world, including even far-distant China and Japan. Twelve years after

its providential birth, in 1845, the society was introduced into the United States. The first conference was established at St. Louis, Mo., and from there it soon spread throughout the land. Men from every walk of life glory in belonging to it. Women are excluded from membership; but through auxiliary associations or as benefactresses they may share in the many indulgences granted the society by the Popes.

The Third Order demands active practical charity from all its members. By becoming affiliated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Tertiaries can find opportunities for such charity. The fact that this society was founded by a Tertiary must be a *source* of joy and pride to all Tertiaries.

#### *Ozanam and Lacordaire*

By their zealous activity in the field of real charity, Ozanam and his associates had forever silenced the taunt of their unbelieving opponents, that Christianity was a dead tree. Our Tertiary soon saw, however, that, to advance the cause of the little Catholic party among the students, something more ambitious should be attempted, and the preachers of doubt and irreligion should be met and vanquished on their own ground. For this a forcible speaker, and one well versed in Catholic theology was deemed necessary. One evening, Ozanam attended services in the little chapel of the *College Stanislaus*. The preacher, though young in years, was a gifted and brilliant speaker. It was the Abbé

Lacordaire. "There is the man we want to confound Jouffroy and his school," Ozanam exclaimed when leaving the church. Here was indeed a man he had often dreamed of and longed for as the champion of Christianity against the infidels of the Paris University. Providence again had directed him to the right person. At once the impetuous lad consulted with his associates. It was thought that a series of conferences to be held in the spacious Notre Dame Cathedral of Paris would do the most good. Immediately they resolved to go the next day to the Archbishop and ask him to appoint Abbé Lacordaire to preach these conferences. The Archbishop received them kindly, blessed their noble work, and dismissed them without, however, acceding to their request. Nothing daunted, and mindful of his vow always to do battle for truth, Ozanam rallied his companions, got up a large petition, and went back to the Archbishop. They found that his Grace was planning to have the ablest speakers of the diocese preach a series of sermons in the Cathedral, and he even introduced the young men to some of the preachers. The young spokesman boldly, but deferentially, explained the reasons why he thought a series of conferences to be more advisable and opportune than sermons. The clergy were very gracious, but they did not understand. The course of sermons was held, and it proved a failure.

The very public intended to be benefited by these sermons, was meanwhile crowding into a little college chapel, where Lacordaire every Sunday was

holding his hearers spellbound by his oratory. It was what Ozanam longed that all the world should hear—the beautiful truths of faith, couched in the language of the new times and conditions. Soon the little chapel became too small for the crowd of eager listeners. Emboldened and encouraged by this, Ozanam and his friends again approached the Archbishop on the subject, and Lacordaire was sent to Notre Dame. With what results, the world knows. For the first time since 1798, Paris witnessed a real revival in religion. Lacordaire himself later attributed the success of these conferences to Ozanam and his intrepid little band.

#### *Doctor of Law*

Ozanam was nearing the completion of his studies, and the time was at hand to decide on his future career. He was now as strongly as ever averse to the profession of law; but, after considering all the sacrifices his father had made for him, he overcame all his personal feelings, took the degree "Doctor of Law" on August 20, 1836, and bravely entered on his duties as lawyer. The cases that came to him were rare, and were not attended by any brilliant results. "My clients," he wrote, "leave me large leisure."

In April, 1837, he was suddenly recalled from Paris to Lyons by the death of his father. "You did not know him," he wrote to a friend, "but if ever your indulgence found anything in me worthy



of esteem or love, attribute it to my father, to his work and example."

### *Doctor of Letters*

Towards the close of the year, 1838, Frederic went up for his degree of Doctor of Letters. The Latin exercise assigned to him was taken from the ancient poets. Dante was the subject of the French dissertation. The success of his first number was pronounced, but that of the latter surpassed even the most sanguine hopes of his friends. It was more than a success; it was a revelation. Dante was known to the French merely as a patriotic poet; Ozanam revealed him as a profound theologian, wielding a great influence on the religious life of the Italians. The cultured audience, spellbound with admiration, listened in breathless silence. M. Cousin, one of the judges, no longer able to control his feelings, cried out, "Ozanam, how is it possible to be so eloquent?"

### *Devotion to His Mother*

Various and promising positions were now open to our model; but, out of filial devotion to his mother, he accepted a position in his native city Lyons, as professor of Commercial Law. His mother's rapidly declining years made him anxious to obtain this appointment, to be near her and to be able to surround her last years with greater comforts. All this, however, did not cause him to relax the active interest he took in affairs of the society so dear to his heart. At Lyons, he organized a

library and a school for the soldiers. All good works meet with opposition, and happily it is opposition that causes them to thrive, serving, as it does, to bring out the defects and faults that are liable to creep into an organization. The Catholic party in the provincial towns of France was seldom known for courage and prudence, and therefore we need not be surprised to find it opposing Ozanam and his work at Lyons. They were too conservative and too engrossed and taken up with their old ingrained political opinions to see any good in this new enthusiastic crusade of charity.

His mother's death, although long expected, came quite suddenly in the end. Writing to his friend Lallier, he thus reveals the deep sentiments of devotion and love that he cherished toward his mother:

"Happy the man to whom God gives a holy mother! This dear memory will never forsake us. Often in my solitude now, in the mist of the anguish that weighs down my soul the remembrance of that august scene (his mother's death) returns to sustain and uplift me. I think of how short life is, how soon we shall be re-united with those from whom death has parted us, and then I feel all temptations of self-love, all the unworthy instincts of my nature fade away and my desires are concentrated in the single one of dying like my mother." (O'Meara.)

What noble sentiments of faith and resignation!  
What an example of imitation for all Tertiaries!

May every Tertiary mother live so that it may be said of her, what Ozanam repeatedly said of his mother, namely, that she had been "the living image of the Church, and the most perfect revelation of Providence to her children."

During the Easter holidays, he made a journey to Paris, and the progress he found there in the St. Vincent de Paul Society filled his heart with hope and joy. "I saw assembled," he writes to a friend, "in the amphitheatre where the sessions are held, more than six hundred members, which does not make the total of its body at Paris. The majority was composed of poor students, but set off, as it were, by a few persons of the highest social position. I elbowed a peer of France, a councillor of state, several generals and distinguished writers. I counted twenty-five members of the *Ecole Normale* (out of a possible seventy-five), ten of the *Polytechnique*, one or two of the *Ecole d'Etat Major*. That morning one hundred and fifty had gone to the altar together. Letters were received from more than fifteen towns in France, where conferences are in full operation; a similar number have been set on foot this year. We are now nearly 2,000 young men enrolled in this peaceful crusade of charity." (O'Meara.) We must not forget that this was written less than five years after the founding of the society. Surely God's blessing was visibly resting on it.

### *Ozanam's Marriage*

During all these years, our friend was unsettled in his mind as to his future vocation. In fact, for some years he carried the thought with him of entering the priesthood. His ardent desire was to serve the cause of truth, to do something for God and humanity, to lead a life of self-forgetfulness, labor, and sacrifice—surely all indications of a priestly calling. He had even written to Père Lacordaire asking him for information concerning the Order of St. Dominic, which this noble priest was just at that time striving to revive in France.

All his plans, however, were upset for a time by the death of his mother. On his visit to Paris, M. Cousin informed him that he intended to nominate him for a professorship at the University of Paris, provided he would compete in the meantime for the *Agregation de Literature* (a general examination in literature). Ozanam accepted, and threw all his energy into the preparation. He resolved to accept the final outcome as an indication of his future career. At the end of September, he went to Paris to pass this examination. It covered the whole field of literature. The theme given him was "The History of the Greek and Latin Scholiasts" (commentators of classical poets). The result, as was to be expected, was a brilliant success. Ozanam's was the first name on the list, and he was immediately offered the position of Assistant Professor in the chair of Foreign Literature. The position in itself

was not very promising, as it was only a temporary one and carried with it a salary of only about \$485.00. But it was a stepping-stone to something higher and gave Ozanam a chance again to be with his dear society.

In this success, he saw another signpost directing him towards a life in the world, and from then on he no longer felt any attraction toward the sacerdotal state. The priest who knew and understood Ozanam better than anyone else, was the Abbé Noirot, the same who saved him in early years from scepticism. This worthy and prudent man had always been of the opinion that Ozanam's life-work was that of a layman in the world. The only advice he had to give to Ozanam, therefore, when he called upon him in his perplexity was, "Get married, my dear fellow, get married."

God who loves the pure of heart and takes their destiny in hand was gently leading Ozanam toward his. But, let us follow here one of our hero's enthusiastic biographers. "He went one day to pay a visit to M. Soulacroix, the rector of the Lyons Academy. In passing through the drawing room to his host's study, he stopped to pay his respects to Madame Soulacroix, and while doing so, noted seated in the window a fair young girl, who was too busy attending to an invalid brother to pay any particular attention to the stranger to whom her mother was speaking. The stranger passed on, but while discoursing on philosophy and other lofty

matters with the learned host, his eyes involuntarily wandered through the open door to the group in the window, where the bright, fair face was bending over the young brother, caressing and amusing him. 'How sweet it would be to have a sister like that to love me!' sighed poor lonely Ozanam as he watched the two; and, though he did not then suspect it, from that hour he was a lost man. . . . That passing interview which had moved his envy of the brother, who had 'such a sweet sister to love him,' had been followed up by others, and soon the friendship had ripened into love. He offered himself to M. Soulacroix as a candidate for his daughter's hand and was accepted." (Horgan, *Great Catholic Laymen.*)

Ozanam at this time was twenty-six years old. Shortly before he had accepted the position at the Paris University of Assistant Professor of Foreign Literature. This position, as we have learned, was only a temporary one and carried a salary hardly sufficient to support a wife and family. His noble character would not permit him to enter into marriage without first acquainting his future wife of his plans and his prospects. He determined, therefore, to lay the state of things frankly before her. If they remained at Lyons, he could offer her comfort, security for the future, and the happiness, which they both valued, of remaining among their own people; but by doing this he would forfeit what he believed to be the noblest part of his service, that which involved sacrifice and renunciation. In

going to Paris, they would have to face poverty; but he would have a wide field of usefulness, and all the conditions of a noble mission. Had she sufficient trust in herself and him to choose the higher and harder part? Amelie was equal to the occasion, and he had not long to wait for a reply. Placing her hand in his she said, "I will trust you."

The marriage took place June 23, 1840. "Last Wednesday," he informs Lallier, a week after the event, "your friend was on his knees; at the altar his eldest brother lifted up his sacerdotal hands, while the younger one made the liturgical responses. At his side you would have seen a young girl dressed in white and veiled, pious as an angel. Happier than I, she was surrounded by her parents; all that heaven left me of a family here below was there; and my old comrades, my friends of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, with numerous acquaintances, filled the choir and peopled the nave. It was beautiful. I could scarcely retain my tears, big delicious tears, as I felt the divine blessing descending on us with the consecrated words." (O'Meara.)

For nearly fifty years Christianity had been banished from the lecture halls of the Sorbonne, whereas they have echoed successively to every new and false doctrine. With the advent of Ozanam a new era was to begin. At the age of twenty-seven he took his seat amongst the veteran professors, and to his youthful enthusiasm was united a burning zeal for truth and Christianity. It was a great

risk on his part. He was only a substitute professor; the university was controlled by the State, and the State was openly hostile to the Church. But Ozanam was ever at his best when the odds were against him.

### *At the Sorbonne*

With painful conscientiousness Ozanam prepared every lecture. Like a skillful general, preparing for battle, he arrayed a mass of material around his thoughts. He made no compromise with error, nor did he allow himself to be influenced by the hostile prejudice of his hearers. His lectures were interesting and full of charm. His vast learning he dispensed with simplicity and brevity, every lecture was a book condensed into a chapter, interesting and captivating. At the outset he showed a little shyness and hesitation, but he soon warmed into eloquence and enchanted his listeners even before he convinced them. His work was one of love, and that gave warmth and zest to his words. The pupils loved him almost to idolatry. Convinced that the pupils should be free to come to their professor for advice, his door was open to them every morning from eight to ten. He took an active and fatherly interest in each and every one. On his way to and from the university, on his strolls along the boulevards of Paris, he was always accompanied by his dear pupils. During the eighteen months of his professorship he never had so much as to call one of the boys to order. His courageous stands for truth and justice, his eloquent defence



of Christian ideals and principles induced many of his pupils and even some of his associate professors to forsake infidelity and embrace the cause of Christianity. In spite of open and direct opposition on the part of the university staff he continued his lectures without lessening the out and out Christian tone of his teaching, and even his most bitter opponents had to respect him for it.

In 1844 M. Fauriel, for whom he had been acting as substitute professor, died. After several months of delay and uncertainty, Ozanam was appointed in his stead as professor of the Sorbonne for life, with the increased salary belonging to the position. This put an end to his financial worries, and when in August, 1845, a little daughter was born to him, he thought his cup of happiness had been filled. "We have called her Marie," he writes in a letter to H. Foisset, "which is her mother's name, as well as that of the powerful protectress to whose intercession we attribute this happy birth. We shall begin her education early, and at the same time, she will begin ours; for I perceive that heaven has sent her to us to teach us a great deal, and to make us better. I cannot look upon that sweet little face, so full of innocence and purity, without seeing there, less obliterated than in us, the sacred impress of the Creator. I cannot think of this imperishable soul, of which I shall have to render an account, without feeling myself more penetrated with my duties. How could I dare teach her lessons that I did not practise? Could God have found a kinder way of

instructing me, of correcting me, and setting my feet on the road to heaven?" Oh, that all our Tertiary parents would understand the sublime truth of these noble words and learn to act and think in like manner!

Ozanam's health, which was never of the best, began to give way under the severe strain, but he did not and would not see it. Often after his arduous work in the class-room, he would rush off to give an evening lecture to an assembly of working men, putting forth on their behalf all his talents as earnestly as if he were addressing the most learned audience. This stress of work could have but one result. The doctors declared that his only chance was to take a year's complete rest. This was a most difficult prescription for Ozanam. How was that active mind to be kept idle for a whole year? The Minister of Public Instruction hastened to facilitate things by sending him on a literary mission to Italy.

Starting in November, 1846, Ozanam with his wife and child made a tour in the South of France, and then went by slow stages through Genoa and Florence to Rome, where they were to pass the winter. Under these delightful circumstances his health rapidly revived, although he did not spare it in the service of his mission. Every journey produced a book, sometimes two, the most charming of all being his work *The Franciscan Poets*, a book designated as a "pearl without equal." Immediately

after Holy Week they left Rome and began a tour through Italy, homewards. They visited several shrines and sanctuaries, but none delighted them so much as that of Assisi, all fragrant as it is with the memory of St. Clare and St. Francis. Here and at this time he was filled with love and admiration for St. Francis and his three orders, a love which he never allowed to cool or diminish.

His health was to all appearances restored and in the autumn of 1847 he again took up his classes at the university.

### *His Great Charity*

The service of the poor occupies such a prominent position in Ozanam's life, that it becomes of interest to know how he performed it. "It was essentially a service of love. His manner towards the poor was as considerate and deferential as towards his equals. He invariably took off his hat on entering their abodes; he never preached to them, and after giving whatever he had to give he would sit and chat on any subject likely to cheer or interest them. At Christmas he always took along some little present, a book, a picture, or some little trifle he knew they fancied. One New Year's day he could not help thinking of a poor family who were in reduced circumstances, and had to pledge their furniture, and that when he saw his little girl surrounded with presents, he would not rest happy till he had redeemed the furniture and returned it to its owners. On returning from Holy Com-

munion he would frequently visit the baker shop on his way and purchase bread to deliver to the poor. He had great order in his almsgiving. The amount of his charities was regulated beforehand every year as strictly as any of his personal expenses, and rose in proportion to the increase of his income. He advised all his friends to adopt this plan and thus save themselves the annoyance of never knowing exactly how they stood with regard to this duty.”—(Horgan.)

In 1848 a revolution broke out in France. Amidst the uproar and universal confusion which followed, Ozanam did not lose faith in his work. He quietly put on the uniform of a National Guard and took his turn of duty at the post of peril with all good citizens. He saw clearly that at the root of all revolutions lay the *social* question, not the *political*. His policy was to avert such outbreaks by charity, by the extension of Catholic ideas, by the drawing together of the classes, by breaking down the barriers that separated them, and which by separation breed mutual mistrust, ignorance, envy and resentment. This was his intention of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. “It is a social question,” he writes; “do away with misery, Christianize the people, and you will make an end of revolutions.”

In the *Ere Nouvelle*, which he edited jointly with Père Lacordaire, he writes: “It is not enough to save France once or several times; a great country wants to be saved every day. You go and come

from one end of the city to the other now in peace and security. But the danger which you flatter yourselves has disappeared from the streets is hid away in the garrets of the houses on either side. You have crushed the insurrection; you have now to deal with an enemy with which you are not acquainted, which you dislike hearing spoken of—misery.”

### *His Literary Works*

“My intention,” writes Ozanam on Good Friday, 1851, “is to write a literary history of the Middle Ages, from the fifth century to the close of the thirteenth. My plan is to trace the growth of Christianity, to write how it understood to build a new society upon the ruins of the old Roman Empire, a society capable of possessing the truth, of doing good and revealing the beautiful. It is now the time to write, to redeem my promise, made eighteen years ago. The historian Gibbon in his youth visited Rome. Once whilst loitering about the Capitol he heard the strains of church music. Looking about he saw the portals of the Basilica of *Ara Coeli* open and Franciscans come forth in procession and march across the way formerly used for triumphal processions. This filled him with anger and prompted the idea, “to revenge antiquity dishonored by Christian barbarism.” The result was his book, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. I also have seen the Franciscans of *Ara Coeli* traverse the court of the Capitol, and I was pleased at this victory of love over brutal force,

and I determined to write the history of the period in which the English historian can find only traces of decline, but wherein I hope to prove the growth of Christianity and show how it led the world from darkness into light." After months of intensive study and research he completed the following parts of this vast work: *History of the Civilization in the V Century*, two volumes—*Schools and Public Instruction in Italy at the Time of the Barbarians*—*German Studies*, whose first part is *The Germans Before Christianity*, and the second, *The Christian Civilization Among the Franks*. This last work twice merited for him the great *Gobert Prize*. In all we have eleven valuable works from the pen of this indefatigable champion of truth.

### *His Last Years*

Ozanam's health was rapidly being undermined due to the fact that, in spite of frequent relapses, he insisted on giving his daily lectures. To the medical men and friends who entreated him to spare himself, he would reply: "I must do my day's work." In April, 1852, he was dangerously ill. He was slowly recovering from this when one day he heard that his impetuous pupils, not knowing the cause of his delay, urgently demanded his presence. "I will do honor to my profession," he cried. Despite the tears of his wife and the entreaties of his medical attendants, he had himself dressed and drove straight to the Sorbonne. When the professor, leaning on the arm of a friend, ad-

vanced through the midst of the crowd of students, those who had criticised him were smitten with horror and remorse; as he ascended the chair their applause broke forth. He stood for some minutes gazing in silence on the thoughtless crowd, his whole apperance that of a man who was nearer death than life. When at last the tumult subsided, he spoke. "Gentlemen, our age is accused of being an age of egotism; we professors, it is said, are tainted with the general epidemic; and yet it is here that we use up our health; it is here that we wear ourselves out. I do not complain of it; our life belongs to you; we owe it to you to our last breath, and you shall have it. For my part if I die it will be in your service." He gave the lecture, speaking with an eloquence and power that startled those who had heard him in his palmiest days. The enthusiasm of the audience rose at last to a frenzy. That was Ozanam's farewell from an audience that for twelve years had crowded to hear him. He spoke truly. This last effort killed him. As soon as it was possible to move him he was taken to Eaux Bonnes, a watering-place, and then to Biarritz. His medical advisers, however, despatched him to Italy for a warmer climate.

The thing which consoled him above all others was the fervent activity of the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, which he found established in the various places through which he passed. "Tears of joy," he writes, "start to my eyes when at these great distances I meet our little family, always little

by the obscurity of its works, but great through the blessing of God upon it. The tongues are different, but it is always the same friendly clasp of the hand, the same brotherly cordiality, and we can recognize each other by the same sign as the early Christians: 'See how they love one another!'

He settled down for the summer at San Jacopo, a little village on the sea near Leghorn. Here he busied himself with readings from the Bible. Prayer and meditation on divine things were the fountains from which he drew consolation and courage.

On April 23, his birthday and the anniversary of his marriage, he wrote in his own hand: "If Thou shouldst chain me to this sick bed for the days that I have yet to live, they would be too short to thank Thee for the days that I have lived. Ah! if these pages be the last I ever write, may they be a hymn to Thy goodness."

### *His Beautiful Death*

At the end of June they went on to Antignano, also near the sea. Up to the end of July he was able to attend Mass daily in the nearby church. From the beginning of August, however, he was not able to leave the house. On the eve of the 15th, he declared he would walk to church and hear Mass the next day. "If it is to be my last walk on earth," he said, "let it be to the house of God on the Feast of the Assumption," and, leaning on her whom he so truly called his guardian angel, he set out on foot. The old curé of the church was dying also;



but when he heard that Ozanam had come to the church and wished to receive communion before Mass, he said to those about him, "Get me up; I must give it to him; no one else shall have that privilege." The dying priest, assisted in his weakness, administered Holy Communion to Ozanam and his wife. It was the last time he exercised his priestly office on earth; neither was Ozanam ever again present at the Holy Sacrifice. On August 31, accompanied by his wife and children and his two brothers, who had hurried to his side, he left Antignano, anxious to return to France to die in his beloved fatherland. When all was ready for the departure he lifted up his hands and said aloud: "O, my God, I thank Thee for the afflictions and the sufferings Thou hast sent me in this place; accept them in expiation of my sins." Then turning to his wife he said: "I wish you, too, to give thanks with me for my sufferings." They prayed in silence for a moment, and then clasping her in his arms, he cried out, "And O, my Lord, I bless Thee for the consolations Thou hast granted me." After a comfortable voyage they landed at Marseilles. Here he asked for the Last Sacraments and he himself answered to all the prayers of the priest. When his brother urged him gently to have confidence in the great mercy of God, he answered with a look of sweet surprise, "Why shall I fear Him? I love Him so much." On the evening of the 8th of September, 1853, surrounded and aided by the prayers of his wife, his brothers and members of the St.

Vincent de Paul Society, the summons came. He had fallen into a gentle slumber, when suddenly opening his eyes, he lifted up his hands and cried out in a loud voice, "My God! my God! have mercy on me!" These were his last words. Frederic Ozanam had passed into the presence of his Redeemer to receive the lasting reward for a holy and noble life. The funeral services were held most solemnly in Paris, the city he loved so well.

My dear Tertiaries, may the life of Ozanam, short in years, but long and rich in the service of God and His poor, be an inspiration and incentive to you all. Read its lessons aright and in it you will find help and consolation. The lesson it teaches is simple and practical. Love God above all things, love your neighbor, especially the poor, in God and for God's sake, and God himself, all-merciful and all-just will be your reward, exceedingly great.





