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## Canonization of Frederick Ozanam History of the Cause

BY

WILLIAM W. SHELDON, C.M.

On 28 April 1983, Pope John Paul II, addressing members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP) who had come to Rome to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Society, said:

Exactly 150 years have passed since the first "Conference of Charity" saw the light of day in Paris: an initiative of young lay Christians, grouped around Frederick Ozanam. Above all, we should thank God for this gift which he has made to the Church in the person of Ozanam. One remains amazed at all that he was able to undertake for the Church, for society, for the poor—this student, professor, father of a family—ardent in his faith, inventive in his charity, during the course of a life too quickly consumed. His name remains linked with that of St. Vincent de Paul, who, two centuries before founded the Ladies of Charity, without the equivalent being able to be instituted for men. And how can we but hope that the Church will place Ozanam also among the ranks of the blessed and the saints?<sup>1</sup>

Since that address in 1983, the Church has completed the beatification process of Frederick Ozanam. She has examined the positions prepared by the postulation concerning his virtuous life and apostolic activity. Pope John Paul II declared that Frederick practiced heroic virtues; the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued a decree to this effect on 6 July 1993.<sup>2</sup> The Medical Consultation of the same

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<sup>1</sup>Pope John Paul II, "Charity is the Heart of the Gospel," *L' Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition, Sixteenth Year, n. 24 [788], (13 June 1983): 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 86, no. 2 (February, 1994): 180-84.

Congregation, on 22 June 1995, unanimously accepted a cure as miraculous and worked through Frederick's intercession.<sup>3</sup> The way is now clear for Frederick Ozanam's beatification.

The *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission* recommend that "lay associations founded by St. Vincent and those which are inspired by his spirit should be of special concern to our members, since they have the right to our presence and to our support."<sup>4</sup> On 30 June 1995, Reverend Robert P. Maloney, C.M., superior general of the Congregation, hosted a meeting of communities and organizations which share the Vincentian spirit to examine how they may work together and help each other.<sup>5</sup> The Conferences of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul surely deserve support of the entire family of Saint Vincent. In recent years members of the SSVP have invited Vincentians to share Vincentian spirituality with them. Getting to know Frederick Ozanam will help us appreciate how the Vincentian charism was, and can be, lived by lay people in today's world. Acquaintance with the history of the cause for canonization may assist us in this goal.

When the cause for the canonization of Frederick Ozanam was introduced in 1925, it followed the process contained in canons 1999-2141 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*.

Preparation of causes came under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>6</sup> In subsequent years, the Holy See introduced modifications which simplified and perfected the process. In 1914 Saint Pius X divided the Congregation of Rites into two sections: a liturgical section and a section for causes of canonization.<sup>7</sup> In 1930 Pius XI instituted the Historical Section of the Congregation of Rites.<sup>8</sup> Pope Paul VI established a new Congregation for the Causes of the Saints in 1969.<sup>9</sup> He also issued a *motu proprio*, *Sanctitas Clarior*,<sup>10</sup> which clarified the competencies of bishops to introduce causes for canonization.

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<sup>3</sup>This fact is reported by the Direction of *Presenza Vincenziana Anno XVIII*, n. 7, (July-August 1995): 7. The decree will be published in the AAS.

<sup>4</sup>*Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, (Philadelphia: 1989), statute 7, §1.

<sup>5</sup>"Letter on the meeting in Paris of those responsible for the four branches of the Vincentian Family," *Vincenziana*, 39th year, no. 3, (May-June, 1995): 137-40.

<sup>6</sup>The Vatican Congregations were called "sacred" until 1985, after which the adjective was omitted in the AAS.

<sup>7</sup>AAS, no. 1 (December, 1914): 25-27.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. 22, no. 2 (February, 1930): 87.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. 61, no. 5 (May, 1969): 297-305.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. 61, no. 3 (March, 1969): 149-53.

In 1983 Pope John Paul II issued the apostolic constitution, *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*,<sup>11</sup> which involved bishops in a more collegial manner in the introduction and investigation of the causes of saints. The cause of Frederick Ozanam was affected by these modifications; however, it basically followed the procedure outlined in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*. A description of this process should help to understand the history of Frederick Ozanam's cause.

### Process by Which a Servant of God Arrived at Beatification

The process of beatification, long and painstaking, consisted of two parts: the first, called the *ordinary process*, began in the diocese where the candidate for the honors of the altar died or where he/she lived for a long time (especially in the last years of his/her life), or where miracles occurred, which were attributed to the Servant of God; the second part, the *apostolic process*, took place under the careful supervision of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome.

#### *Ordinary Process*

The ordinary process was instituted by the ordinary or bishop of the diocese. This was done, either on his own initiative or at the request of interested persons or associations (the actor or sponsor), and served for the introduction of the cause. It examined the cause in a general way, to see whether or not it merited serious consideration by the Holy See. It consisted of three distinct parts: (1) the informative process which gathered testimony concerning the reputation for holiness of life, virtues and miracles in general, or martyrdom; (2) a process which collected and examined all the writings of the Servant of God; (3) a process to show that public ecclesiastical cult had not been shown towards the Servant of God.

The documentation for all the above processes was sent to Rome by means of an authentic copy, called the *transumptum*. The chancellor of the Sacred Congregation checked, annotated, and authenticated the *transumptum*, thereby producing a public copy of the ordinary pro-

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid. 75, Pars I, no. 4 (April, 1983): 349-55.

cess. This public copy was then consigned to the postulator of the cause as the basis for further work.

In the meantime the writings of the Servant of God were carefully examined by two theological censors to see if they contained anything contrary to faith or morals.

An advocate-procurator for the postulation next prepared a *Position* which petitioned the Holy See for the introduction of the cause. The *Position* contained a complete description of all the testimony of the process. The promotor of the faith, the famous devil's advocate, usually offered objections to the *Position*. These objections had to be answered by the postulator and advocate. The complete *Position* was discussed by the cardinals and officials of the Sacred Congregation. If the result of their discussion was favorable, the Holy Father signed a decree for a commission for the introduction of the cause. At this point, the cause was withdrawn from the competency of the bishop and passed to the exclusive competency of the Holy See. Finally the ordinary process concerning the non-existence of public cult was examined by the Sacred Congregation. If cult had been given, the cause was suspended until the removal of the undue cult.

### *Apostolic Process*

After the decree on the non-existence of public cult, remissorial letters were sent to the bishop of the diocese where the ordinary informative process had been constructed. These letters gave permission to institute the apostolic process, whose purpose was to examine the virtues of the Servant of God in searching detail.

When this process was completed, a copy of the documentation was sent to Rome. The Sacred Congregation first examined the validity of the processes, to see if all the juridical norms prescribed by law had been observed. The advocate next prepared a *Position on the Virtues* which was discussed in an antepreparatory congregation, composed of prelates and theologian-consultors of the Sacred Congregation, in the presence of the cardinal *Ponente* (presenter) of the cause. The results of this congregation, with the addition of any new observations of the promotor of the faith and the replies of the advocate, were again discussed by the persons mentioned above and by the cardinals who composed the Sacred Congregation in a preparatory congregation. If the votes were favorable, all the above-mentioned persons reunited in a general congregation in the presence of the Holy

Father for a definitive vote, following which the Holy Father issued a decree, testifying that the Servant of God had practiced virtues in an heroic degree. With such a decree, the Servant of God was declared Venerable.

### *Miracles*

Having finished the examination of the virtues, similar processes were followed to examine the miracles attributed to the intercession of the Servant of God. The apostolic process on miracles was instituted by mandate of the Sacred Congregation through remissorial letters. The bishop of the diocese where the asserted miracles took place conducted this process with precise and particular questionnaires. At these investigations, in addition to the usual members of the tribunal, a medical doctor also had to be present. He had the right, *ex officio*, to ask questions concerning the alleged miracle.

The process was sent to Rome, a public copy of the acts was made, and the juridical validity of the process was established. The *Position* was printed, with all the acts of the process and the votes of expert doctors. It passed to the medical commission. Finally, the complete *Position* was studied by the theological consultants, the prelates, and the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. When the vote was favorable, a general congregation was held in the presence of the Holy Father. If the votes were positive, the Holy Father ordered the promulgation of the decree approving the miracle.

Through an apostolic letter, which was read in Saint Peter's Basilica in the presence of the members of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the Vatican Chapter and numerous people, the Venerable Servant of God was given the title of Blessed, with all liturgical honors. This terminated the first phase of the cause—the beatification.

## **The Cause of Frederick Ozanam**

### *Ordinary Process*

The cause of Frederick Ozanam followed most of this procedure. Frederick died on 8 September 1853 in Marseilles, at the age of forty. He was buried in the crypt of the Église des Carmes, near the Institut Catholique in Paris. The ordinary process took place in Paris from 10

June 1925 to 9 June 1928. Already seventy-two years had passed since his death.<sup>12</sup>

The ecclesiastical tribunal met to examine witnesses who could testify to the life, virtues, reputation for holiness, and miracles of Frederick. Among the thirty-one witnesses who testified, only one, Elizabeth Cornudet,<sup>13</sup> was an eye-witness who had known Frederick, his wife, and their daughter, Marie. She was the daughter of Léon Cornudet, a friend of Frederick, who was chosen as tutor for Marie when Frederick died in 1853. Elizabeth was then about ten years old. All the other witnesses who testified had not known Frederick personally. They had only heard about him from others, so naturally their testimony was limited. They portrayed the life of Ozanam in a general way, without many nuances. They admired Ozanam as a holy man of God and as a scholar.

Among the ecclesiastics who testified were two Vincentian priests, Francis X. Verdier, C.M., superior general, and Lucien P. Misermont, C.M. Father Verdier's testimony relied on knowledge he had gathered from the writings and biographies of Frederick Ozanam. He expressed the opinion that the remarkable spread of the SSVP throughout the world should be considered as a miracle to further the cause. He testified that in the Vincentian community Frederick Ozanam was considered a "saint," whose characteristic virtue was humility. This humility led the first members of the SSVP not to seek powerful protectors but to place themselves simply in the school of Sister Rosalie Rendu.<sup>14</sup>

Father Misermont, noted Vincentian historian, brought his historical expertise in testifying at the ordinary process. His knowledge came principally from a long and scholarly reading of the letters and biographies of Ozanam. His testimony reconstructed the life of Ozanam, illustrating his thought and works and showing Ozanam's virtues from his very words. For Misermont, Ozanam belonged to the school of sanctity of the apostolate. It was in the exercise of charity towards

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<sup>12</sup>According to canon 2149 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, the ordinary informative process should begin thirty years after the death of the Servant of God. According to canon 2101, the discussion concerning the virtues could not take place until fifty years had passed since the death of the Servant of God. In extraordinary cases, where the veneration of the Servant of God was very widespread, the pope might dispense from the observance of this canon. This was done for Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, Saint Maria Goretti, and Saint Pius X.

<sup>13</sup>Elizabeth Cornudet died at Villemoisson-sur-Orge on 2 June 1927.

<sup>14</sup>*Positio Super Virtutibus—Informatio et Summarium* (Roma, 1990), 359-61. François-Xavier Verdier, C.M., priest, doctor in philosophy and theology, superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, was born 1 March 1856 and died in Paris, 26 January 1933.

his neighbor that he practiced virtues to an heroic degree and arrived at sanctity. In the heart of Ozanam there were two insatiable needs: to do good for the poor and to establish Conferences of the SSVP. Until his last breath, he was involved with the poor and with the Conferences. We find in his writings sublime pages on love for the poor which Saint Vincent would have willingly signed.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of the ordinary process, numerous documents were brought forth by the witnesses and the postulator, notably, the *Notes written by Madame Ozanam for Père Lacordaire*.<sup>16</sup> But all of this did not provide a sufficiently complete knowledge of the Servant of God's personality.

The examination of the vast quantity of Frederick's writings, the work of the theological censors, was not an easy task; it took time. The decree of approval of the writings was given on 11 November 1949.

In 1953 the promotor of the faith presented his observations on the ordinary process and the evaluation of Ozanam's writings.<sup>17</sup> It was his duty to examine the acts of the process with a critical eye—to pose questions and objections that occurred to him in his careful scrutiny of the life of the candidate for canonization. Among the objections submitted by the promotor of the faith were the following. (1) The sponsors of the cause and the postulation had waited a long time before introducing the cause—some seventy-two years after the death of Frederick Ozanam. (2) Consequently those who could have testified to the holiness of Ozanam from first-hand knowledge had died. The witnesses of the ordinary process in 1925 were, with one exception, all second-hand—they had heard about Ozanam from those who had known him. For the most part, their testimony was very general and not specific enough, for example, some said that Ozanam had practiced the theological and moral virtues to an heroic degree, but they did not show how he had done this. (3) Ozanam produced a great quantity of written material. This must be examined to give a more complete portrait of his personality and sanctity. (4) The historical,

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid. 372-97. Lucien Pierre Misermont, C.M., priest, doctor in canon law, licentiate in theology, was born 17 July 1864 and died in Paris, 16 May 1940.

<sup>16</sup>*Positio Super Introductione Causae* (Rome: 1953). *Summarium*, n. XVI, 584-604. In this volume the following documents are bound together: *Informatio*, 1-69, *Tabula Index testium et Summarii*: I-IX, *Summarium*, 1-701, *Litterae Postulatoriae*, 1-133, *Animadversiones Promotoris Generalis Fidei*, 1-20, *Summarium ex officio super scriptis*, 1-181, *Responsio Patroni ad Animadversiones*, 1-22.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. *Animadversiones Promotoris Generalis Fidei super dubio "An signanda sit Commissio Introductionis Causae in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur,"* 1-20.



political, social, and religious circumstances of Ozanam's life are very complex. He was a man very much alive and involved; his life touched many persons and events. All this must be carefully studied to see how his alleged holiness shines through. (5) Because historical documents play an important part in the cause, it seems opportune that the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation should study them carefully to see whether they show a true picture of extraordinary holiness and that there are no obstacles.

### *Apostolic Process*

Despite these weighty objections, the Sacred Congregation allowed the postulation to proceed to the apostolic process in 1955-1956. On the part of the postulation there was a desire to avoid the time, work, and expenses required for a study by the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation. There seems to have been hope that the examination of witnesses who had heard from eye-witnesses—*ex auditu a videntibus*—would have been sufficient for the apostolic process. This took place in Paris from 30 September 1955 to 6 June 1956. Twenty-three witnesses were heard. Elizabeth Cornudet, the only eyewitness from the ordinary process, had died on 2 June 1927. When the postulator brought the apostolic process to Rome in 1956, he was confident that it would be approved and the cause could go forward. This did not prove to be the case. The two processes, ordinary and apostolic, were officially authenticated on 17 January 1962. At that time it was judged that it was not possible to proceed to the discussion of the heroic virtues solely on the basis of the material approved, and the intervention of the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation was indicated.

As often happens when a cause suffers a setback like this, nothing is done for some time; the cause "sleeps." In 1970 Father L. Giuseppe Lapalorcia, C.M., was appointed postulator of the cause. Together with officers of the SSVP, he began to dialogue with officials of the Sacred Congregation to see what could be done to get the cause moving again. As a result of this dialogue, on 12 October 1973, the Sacred Congregation issued a decree,<sup>18</sup> which said in part:

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<sup>18</sup>For this decree (Prot. N. 270-24/973) see archives of the Vincentian postulator in Rome.

Since the proofs required by Canon Law, which must be thorough, are altogether deficient in the Cause for beatification and canonization of the layman, Frederick Ozanam, Father Giuseppe Lapalorcia, C.M., the legitimately designated Postulator for this Cause, has earnestly requested from the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints that the proofs from witnesses be complemented by new reasons drawn from documents. . . .

The Actor of the Cause should prepare the *Position concerning the Virtues* of the Servant of God as usual, adding in the *Summary* opportune explanations concerning the depositions of the witnesses, at the same time adding documents shown by these same witnesses. To the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation is committed the preparation of a *Study (Disquisitio)* treating a number of selected questions which are especially related to the Cause.

The *Study*—historical, critical and documented—would attempt to establish as clearly and completely as possible the principal stages of Frederick's life, thought and activity, in view of the cause. The scholarly work would complement the *Position on the Virtues*, which still had to be prepared by the postulation.

This *Study*<sup>19</sup> was undertaken by a vice-postulator, Étienne Diebold, C.M., and supervised by Monsignor Giovanni Papa, vice-relator of the Historical Section. Father Diebold completed the study in 1980. In the opinion of Monsignor Papa, to finish a monumental work of 1255 pages in seven years was something of a "record." The work, written in French, contains thirteen chapters. Each chapter is divided into two parts: the first part treats the theme, the second part presents documentary proof for various aspects of the theme. The important topics treated are: (1) Ozanam's life at Lyons, his early schooling; (2) Ozanam and the Catholic liberalism of Lamennais and his school; (3) Organization and development of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; (4) Ozanam and Lacordaire; (5) Ozanam the lawyer; (6) Ozanam's marriage and family life; (7) Ozanam and freedom of teaching; (8) Ozanam

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<sup>19</sup>The title page of the *Study* is in Latin—*Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum, Officium Historicum 88, Massilien. Seu Parisien. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Friderici Ozanam Patrisfamilias Primarii Fundatoris Societatis Conferentiarum S. Vincentii a Paulo Disquisitio De Vita et Actuositate Servi Dei* (Romae, MCMLXXX).

as professor at the Sorbonne in the chair of foreign literature; (9) Ozanam and the papacy, his political, social and economic ideas, his attitude during the revolution of 1848; (10) his writings; (11) his last years and death; (12) witnesses immediately after his death; and (13) in later years.

The postulation and the advocate, Carlo Snider, a former member of the SSVP, resumed the work of preparing the *Position on the Virtues*. Usually the *Position* quotes at length testimony given in the ordinary and apostolic processes. As the postulation and advocate considered this work in light of Father Diebold's *Study*, it seemed neither necessary nor helpful to publish all this testimony. So the postulation petitioned the Sacred Congregation for permission to include in the *Position on the Virtues* only those depositions from the ordinary and apostolic processes which were really essential to illustrate the virtues of the Servant of God and did not contain repetitions. The Sacred Congregation willingly granted this permission in a decree dated 20 December 1982.

The 1983 apostolic constitution of Pope John Paul II, *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, provided that the causes of the Servants of God pending at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints should proceed according to the spirit of the new law. The Congregation was directed to establish rules for these causes. Following these new rules, on 23 April 1990, Reverend Yvon Beaudoin, O.M.I., was nominated as relator of the cause. In this same year the *Position on the Virtues* was completed and printed.<sup>20</sup> Carlo Snider, advocate of the cause, had died before the work was finished. The work was completed by a new advocate, Monsignor Luigi Porsi, under the direction of Father Alberto Piras, C.M., who succeeded Father William Sheldon, C.M. as postulator in 1984. The *Position* uses the *Study* of Father Diebold, presenting testimony of the ordinary and apostolic processes in the *Summarium* and illustrating how Frederick Ozanam practiced the theological and cardinal virtues to an heroic degree in the *Informatio*.

Continuing to follow the 1983 norms of the Congregation, the postulation submitted all the work for examination and evaluation by a group of historical consultors. The consultors met on 3 March 1992 to express their judgment on the following questions: "Were the inves-

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<sup>20</sup>*Positio Super Virtutibus, Informatio et Summarium* (Roma: 1990). This work binds together in one volume: a *Presentation* by R. P. Yvon Beaudoin, O.M.I., relator, *Informatio*, 1-98, *Summarium*, 1-443, and the *Decretum super validitate Processuum*, 1.

tigations of the documents to illustrate the life and activity of Frederick Ozanam thorough and correctly done? Are the documents which were gathered and inserted in the *Position* worthy of historical faith? In these same documents, were elements found which give a solid basis to judge the reputation for holiness and the practice of virtues of the Servant of God?" The six consultors unanimously gave an affirmative reply to all these questions.<sup>21</sup> This examination and judgment prepared for, and facilitated, the evaluation of the documents by the theological consultors of the Congregation.

Eight theological consultors met with the promotor of the faith and the relator of the cause on 18 December 1992. They discussed the traditional, famous question: "Whether in the cause for canonization of the Servant of God, Frederick Ozanam, it is agreed concerning the practice of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity towards God and the neighbor and also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, and the virtues connected with them, in an heroic degree, in this case and for the purpose had in mind?"<sup>22</sup> The evaluation and votes of the theological consultors and the promotor of the faith were affirmative and unanimous.

### *Miracle*

The postulation set to work to examine an extraordinary cure—that of eighteen month old Fernando Luis Benedito Ottoni of malignant diphtheria. The cure had taken place at Nova Friburgo (Rio de Janeiro), Brazil, on 2 February 1926.<sup>23</sup> Although the miracle is referred to in the ordinary process (Paris, 1925-1928),<sup>24</sup> the diocesan inquiry did not take place until 1994. It was possible to interrogate Fernando, now seventy years old and in excellent health, and his two sisters, Leonzia and Maria. In Rome the Medical Consultation of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints met on 22 June 1995 and unanimously accepted the cure as having taken place through the intercession of Frederick Ozanam.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Relazione sulla Seduta dei Consultori Storici tenuta il 3 marzo 1992, 57.

<sup>22</sup>Relatio et Vota Congressus Peculiaris super Virtutibus die 18 Decembris an. 1992 habiti (Roma: 1992), 90.

<sup>23</sup>Father Giuseppe Guerra, C.M., postulator, gives an account of this miracle in "The Causes for Beatification and Canonization in the Vincentian Family (II), II. Servants of God, 4. The Venerable Frederick Ozanam," *Vincentiana*, 39th Year, No. 2 (March-April, 1995): 72.

<sup>24</sup>Positio Super Introductione Causae (Rome: 1953), *Summarium*, n. XVI, 584-604.

<sup>25</sup>The text of the decree approving the miracle will be published in the AAS.

## Conclusion

Father Verdier testified that the Vincentian community regarded Frederick Ozanam as a saint. Over the years many members of the Vincentian Family have confirmed this fact. Vincentian confreres have served as postulators for the cause of canonization since 1974. Confreres and Daughters of Charity have worked with the SSVP. Father Joseph Dirvin, C.M., translated and published a selection of his letters.<sup>26</sup> Those who have come to know and admire Ozanam will want to make him known to others. Knowledge leads to imitation, devotion, and prayer. God answers prayers through miracles. Hopefully all this will soon result in Frederick's canonization.

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<sup>26</sup>*Frédéric Ozanam: A Life in Letters*, Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., trans. and ed. (Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Council of the United States: 1986).