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The History Of The Cause for the Beatification Of Frederick Ozanam

by Roberto D'Amico CM
Postulator General

The Venerable Frederick Ozanam lived in the first half of the 19th century. His life, of barely 40 years, spanned a period when French and European politics, as well as the history of the Church, were undergoing upheavals which, up to then, would have seemed unthinkable. During his brief adulthood Frederick was someone who felt deeply about things, and who lived intensely. He made a notable contribution to culture, to society and, above all, to the apostolate of the laity in the Church. The effects of this have happily lasted up to the present day.

He died in 1853, venerated and respected by all who loved him and also by some who had opposed him, with obvious indications that he had a reputation for holiness. Writings honouring him and showing the sort of person he was began appearing even before his death, but naturally increasing after it. In 1855, just two years after his death, his *Oeuvres complètes* (Complete Works) were published, in view of the on-going good effects of his writings and teaching which had begun during his short life. In 1879 his brother, Mgr Alphonse Ozanam, published a fuller biography, following the short one written by the great Dominican preacher Fr Lacordaire.

In 1913 the centenary of Ozanam's birth was celebrated by the Society of St Vincent de Paul by publishing a "Centenary Book". In this work historians and men of letters stressed that our Venerable was not merely a learned man but one rich in the greatest virtues, to the point of being worthy of the title "saint".

At this stage it was felt necessary to start the ordinary [i.e. diocesan] process for beatification.

The delay was due to the obvious need for an in-depth study of someone so involved, and in so many ways, in the world of the laity, and to the unfavorable political climate in France, and to the World War.

It was not, therefore, till 10 June 1925 (72 years after the death of the Venerable) that the Ordinary Process began in Paris. This was to examine his reputation for holiness, his virtues, and any alleged miracles. It was hardly surprising that only one witness (N^o 14) could claim that when he was a small boy he had known him. The other thirty gave evidence of what they had heard from those who had lived with him. Along with the oral evidence many important documents were collected, especially material written by his widow.

In September 1932 the *Informatio super introductione Causae* was ready, but the *Animadversiones* requested at that time by the General Promoter of the Faith were not ready till 1952.

In the years 1955-56 the Apostolic process was held in the Chancery Office of the

archdiocese of Paris, more than 100 years after the death of the Venerable.

All this meant that the cause would have a historical aspect, and we are enormously grateful to Fr Etienne Diebold whose tireless work produced a very important historical publication of about 1,300 pages entitled *Disquisitio de vita et actuositate Servi Dei* and subtitled *Etude critique et Documents*. Thanks to this work and to the *Positio super virtutibus -- Informatio et Summarium*, Rome 1990, the Historical Consultors on March 3, 1992, and the Special Congress of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on December 18, 1992, gave affirmative replies to the questions concerning the historical consistency of the cause and the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God.

Subsequently the cardinals and bishops in an ordinary session on May 4, 1993, gave a unanimous favorable decision on the holiness of the Servant of God.

Finally, the Holy Father, welcoming and ratifying the replies of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, ordered the drawing up of the Decree on the heroicity of virtues, on July 6, 1993.

After the publication of the Decree the postulator presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints a case of healing, attributed to the intercession of the same Venerable, in order to have its miraculous nature recognized with a view to beatification.

The case concerns an eighteen month old Brazilian boy, Fernando Benedetto Ottoni, afflicted with "a serious form of diphtheria affecting his total physical health", who was healed at the beginning of February back in 1926 in Nova Friburgo, Brazil. This person is still alive.

At a meeting of the medical consulters on June 22, 1995, there was unanimous agreement on the inexplicability, from the natural and scientific points of view, of the healing of this little boy.

At an ordinary meeting of the theological consulters on November 24, 1995, there was unanimous agreement on the miraculous nature of the healing and on its attribution to the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Frederick Ozanam.

At an ordinary meeting of the cardinals and bishops on May 21, 1996, there was unanimous agreement on the reliability and soundness of the proofs, and on the miracle attributed to the Venerable Ozanam.

On June 25 the Holy Father, by the Decree *super miro*, ratified the decision of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On August 22, 1997, the Holy Father John Paul II, within the framework of the celebrations for the World Youth Day in Paris, will beatify Frederick Ozanam.

Thomas Davitt CM, translator