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Frédéric Ozanam, Catholic Student (1831-1836)

BY

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In the political and socio-economic milieu of nineteenth-century France the privileges enjoyed by the elite classes were no longer conveyed as a matter of noble inheritance. The French Revolution had destroyed the hierarchical social structures of the Ancien Régime through the abolition of traditional privileges which benefitted the nobility and corporate bodies such as the University. As part of its intended reconstruction of French Society, the Revolution reorganized societal institutions in ways designed to create and sustain a new elite.

Ozanam's presence as a university student in the Latin Quarter of Paris between 1831 and 1836, when he received his diploma, represented time spent serving a sort of professional apprenticeship to enter the elite class. During these years he was among several thousand young bourgeois men from the provinces (5,000 in 1830; 7,500 in 1835) who annually migrated to the city the writer Honoré Balzac eloquently described as the "capitol of learning." Part of the attraction of Paris was indeed the presence of its prestigious universities. The renown of these institutions was created by the diversity of disciplines taught there, as well as by the richness of their libraries.

Consequently, for many young men from Lyon, the schools of law in Dijon or Grenoble had little or no attraction and were treated with scorn. Frédéric Ozanam, like his father, thought "nothing much comes from the law schools in the country." Paris, the capital of higher education in France, fed itself like an insatiable Minotaur on successive generations of more-or-less brilliant students produced by the colleges in the provinces. To have studied law or medicine in Paris thus provided entry into the elite class of French society.

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Ozanam: A Catholic Childhood in Lyon

Born in 1813, the son of a doctor, Frédéric belonged by birth to the social class that provided Paris' universities with their largest numbers of students. He did not belong to the generation that, as Alfred de Musset superbly described in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, had grown up in the Napoleonic Empire amid the sounds of clashing swords and cannon fire. He was born in Milan where his father, originally a merchant, had settled before deciding relatively late in life (in 1809, at the age of thirty-seven) to study medicine. He studied, and later practiced, in Pavia before returning to Lyon after the fall of the Empire to become a renowned doctor at the Hôtel-Dieu.

According to Amélie Ozanam (the daughter of Jean-Joseph Soulacroix, the Rector of the academy of Lyon, and Frédéric's wife after 1841), "in 1816, his parents, not wanting to raise their young family in Italy under Austrian dominion, returned to Lyon, their homeland." Frédéric's father, Antoine, had served in the young Napoleon Bonaparte's army at Arcole and Lodi. This career path, as exotic as it may seem, was not unique in an era when the political upheavals of the Revolution and Empire led to commensurate social upheavals as well. The author of the voluminous *Histoire des maladies épidémiques contagieuses et épizootiques*, which appeared in 1817 and 1823, Antoine Ozanam also wrote more popular medical works (including a collection of advice on pregnancy, and, in 1832, on methods of protecting oneself from cholera). He was also interested in historical studies (on the eve of the Revolution of 1830, he published *Mémoire statistique pour servir à l'histoire de l'établissement du christianisme à Lyon*), and he contributed to a variety of contemporary Parisian revues.

Frédéric Ozanam frequently recalled the pious education he received from his parents, and from his older sister (his "first teacher") who died when he was only seven years old. His parents had a total of fourteen children. According to custom, his father encouraged his oldest son to study medicine: Charles-Alphonse (1804-1888), nine years Frédéric's senior, studied under Guillaume Dupuytren and submitted his doctoral thesis in 1826, then immediately entered the seminary at Saint-Sulpice. He was ordained a priest in February 1831 and ministered to workers, domestics, and women in general before accepting the honor of a papal prelature. Charles Ozanam (1824-1890), the couple's youngest child, also studied medicine and cared for the wounded during the revolution of June 1848, including the archbishop of Paris Monseigneur Denis-Auguste Affre. He became a proponent of homeopathy in France, which put him at odds with the proponents of

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4. Ibid., p. XVII.
traditional medical practices and limited his career opportunities. Frédéric himself was destined for a career in law. This brings to mind the example of the two sons of Achille-Cléophas Flaubert, a distinguished surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu of Rouen, the oldest of whom, Achille, was destined for a career in medicine and the younger, Gustave, for law.

Frédéric's education was pious but also humanistic, a legacy from his classically-educated father. The few letters that have been preserved from his adolescence testify to a light-hearted character. He was inclined to write poetry, and critique the work of his friends (a censor amicus, as he described himself to his friend Auguste Materne). He was also subject to occasional bouts of melancholy. In short, he seemed to be a perfect "child of his time," except for one detail: the time was one of incredulity and Voltarianism, especially evidenced in the July Revolution of 1830 which was marked by a wave of anticlericalism culminating in the sack of the palace of the archbishop of Paris in February 1831.

Contemporary accounts agree that the majority of the bourgeois youth in collèges, lycées, and universities were hostile to the Church as an institution and indifferent to Catholicism as a religion. Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, eleven years Ozanam's senior, recalled the pervasive atheism he found in the lycée in Dijon, fruitless work with a group of Catholic college students in the city's law school, and the failure of the Société-des-Bonnes-Études in Paris. Ozanam himself, while he was working as a law clerk, recalled the "blasphemies" and other "despicable conversations" of his friends. He doubted neither the Church, nor his Catholic faith. At the age of seventeen, he declared that his life's work would be "to study the universality and perpetuity of religious ideas," by examining these ideas


6 Gustave Flaubert (b. 12 December 1821 – d. 8 May 1880) left his family home in Rouen to study law in Paris in 1840. Accounts indicate he was disinterested in his legal studies, and not fond of the city. After six years, and difficulty with his health, he dropped his studies entirely and left Paris. He returned home to live with his mother and devoted himself to writing. Flaubert is perhaps best known for penning the novel Madame Bovary (1857).


8 See notably Louis de Carné, Souvenirs de ma jeunesse au temps de la Restauration (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1873); Edmond d'Alton-Shee, Mes Mémoires (1826-1848) (Paris: Lacroix-Verboecken, 1869), first part: 1826-1839.


10 Frédéric Ozanam to Auguste Materne, 19 April 1831, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 29, p. 42.
in primitive religions. However, during the time that he studied rhetoric and philosophy in Lyon he was plagued by doubts as well as by “sensual temptations,” though he noted that he did not succumb to “the fatal passion of love.” It seems that the influence of Joseph-Mathias Noirot, his philosophy professor, was decisive in reaffirming his faith.

Ozanam, Catholic Student in Paris

Ozanam was preceded in Paris by another famous Lyonnais, Jules Favre, four years his senior and whose career was not dissimilar to Frédéric’s. Favre also obtained his baccalauréat in 1825 at the age of sixteen and, like Frédéric, spent two years serving as a law clerk in Lyon before enrolling in the law faculty in Paris in November 1827. He obtained his licence in July 1830, just as revolution was again breaking out in Paris. Favre wrote the largely autobiographical novel Henry Belval, the story of a student who, though supportive of the democratic cause and the revolution of 1830, nevertheless led an ascetic life, attended Mass frequently, worked with furious energy, and imposed severe penances upon himself in order to refuse temptations to seek the “coarse loves” pursued by his comrades, who in turn taunted him and set traps designed to make him succumb.

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11 Frédéric Ozanam to Hippolyte Fortoul and Claude Huchard, February 1831, Lettres, vol. 5, n° 1341, p. 17. See also the long letter to Ernest Falconnet, 4 September 1831, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 32, pp. 44-47.
Bowing to his father’s wishes, Ozanam travelled to Paris to study law. Thanks to his student records, preserved in the archives of the law faculty, we can trace his university studies. He received his baccalauréat in literature in Lyon on 22 September 1829, at the age of seventeen. He then spent two years as a law clerk in Lyon before registering for law classes for the first time on 7 November 1831. His career as a student was brilliant. Frédéric earned his bachelier degree in law in August 1833, and his licence one year later; he was only twenty-one years old. One is struck by the exacting nature of his studies, and by the unbroken string of his successes in examinations.

Without a doubt, Ozanam was a brilliant student, who had a broad range of intellectual interests other than law, for which he admittedly did not have a great fondness. He did find the history and philosophy of law to be of interest, but he was put-off by the chicanery and twists and turns of legal procedure. From the sometimes tense replies in letters from his father, one senses he pressed Frédéric to continue his law studies, and to put Bacon, Dante, and Saint Thomas aside.

With the consent of his father, who promised to pay for two extra years of study, Frédéric proceeded to work towards a doctorate. This was at a time when the majority of students studying law did not proceed to this level of study. He obtained this degree, without honors, in 1846, after having submitted one thesis on Roman law and another on French law. At the same time, Ozanam, who had not abandoned his interest in literature, obtained his licence in literature in 1835. Three years later he received his doctorate in literature, again with two theses, one Latin and one French, which set forth the foundation of his last intellectual contributions: Dante et la philosophie catholique au XIIIe siècle.

Not content to just study law and literature, Ozanam made use of the rich library of the Ampère family (also originally from Lyon), with whom he was staying in Paris. He read and translated German works on Tibet and “primitive” religions, learned English (which “in Paris it was considered

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14 See Archives nationales de France, AJ 6 1603 sq. (ordered alphabetically).
15 The bachelier was a degree at the university level which is no longer used. It corresponded to two years of studies completed after the lycée. The licence was, and still is, obtained after three years of post-baccalauréat study.
18 The son, Jean-Jacques, born in 1800, specialist in medieval literature, substituted for Charles-Claude Fauriel and Abel-François Villemain at the Sorbonne before succeeding Andrieux as the chair of history of French literature at the Collège de France in 1833.
almost shameful not to know” (19), as well as Hebrew and Sanskrit. He was also interested in Indian civilization and Buddhism. He frequently attended chemistry and botany courses held at the famous Jardin des Plantes. Moreover, Frédéric participated, with university approval, in the development of a small conference of law students who wanted opportunities to practice the art of public speaking.

Ozanam also attended history lectures, and was invited to the gatherings for youth held every Sunday evening by Charles de Montalembert, “where the perfumed smell of Catholicism and liberty” reigned, and where not only literature and history were discussed but also the conditions of the poor. (20) These soirées were attended by “the most famous champions of contemporary Catholic thought” in high European society — Adam Mickiewicz, Frédéric Méróde, Alfred de Vigny — and by Victor Considérant, with hotly contested debates accompanied by hot punch and fine pastries to which the young students did not remain impervious.

Naturally inquisitive and talented, Ozanam attended courses taught by many of the academic personalities of the day, regretting that too often they had substitutes teach in their place. Notably, he heard Eugène L’Herminier, who taught legislation at the Collège de France, André Ampère, Jean-François Champollion, and Charles-Claude Fauriel, whom he succeeded in 1845. However, he was not content to merely attend these classes, and very quickly he began to take an active part in them. He strongly opposed supporters of the rationalist school of philosophy such as Victor Cousin, Théodore-Simon Jouffroy, Edgar Quinet, or the Saint-Simonians. Instead Ozanam supported the spiritualists, like François-René Chateaubriand, Félicité Lamennais, and Pierre-Simon Ballanche (another Lyonnais) whom he visited, and also Louis Bonald, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Johann Joseph von Görres.

Furthermore, Ozanam endorsed the written protests young Catholics addressed to rationalist teachers, and soon thereafter the oral protests read publicly in front of these professors. The first victim was Saint-Marc Girardin, a history professor at the Sorbonne, accused of having characterized the papacy as a passing institution and having linked the clergy and despotism. The second victim was Théodore-Simon Jouffroy, a philosophy professor, who was accused of having called Divine Revelation into question. When liberal Belgian students dared to insult two bishops and criticize the Catholic University of Louvain, it was again Ozanam who took up the pen to protest against these “backward 18th century students.” (21) He joined with other

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19 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 26 May 1832, Lettres, vol. 1, no 47, p. 81.
20 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 5 January 1833, Ibid., no 53, p. 92.
Catholic students to ask for public lectures on religious subjects. This request was successful and the first talks were given by Olympe-Philippe Gerbet, a strong supporter of the doctrines of Lamennais. Ozanam attended the sermons of Théodore Combalot, and especially the lectures given by Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, first at the Collège Stanislas, then with considerable success at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. Frédéric wrote an article on these for *L'Univers*.

The Social Sphere of the Student

Ozanam, a man with many connections, was in contact with the world of the Latin Quarter even before becoming a student there. While still in Lyon he corresponded with his slightly older friends in Paris, notably Hippolyte Fortoul, the future Minister of Public Instruction. Frédéric lived in Paris, starting early in November 1831, in a boarding house situated near the Jardin des Plantes on the outskirts of the Latin Quarter. The neighborhood was not very urbanized, and had a relatively low cost of living that attracted many small merchants and workers. The new student immediately complained that he lived too far from the university and its faculty, classrooms, and libraries. Ozanam was slow to find his bearings in a city that seemed to him so atheistic as to have raised a pagan temple.

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22 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 10 February 1832, *Lettres*, vol. 1, no. 43, pp. 72-73.
23 Eight letters from 14 October 1829 to 7 October 1831, *Lettres*, vol. 5, nos. 1336 to 1343.
like the Pantheon. He preferred his nearby parish church, Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. Like Balzac, he developed a dichotomous vision of Paris: a city with an absolute border between darkness and light, the best and the worst, a Janus-like place with two faces, "with its beauties and its horrors, its edifices and its shacks, its lights and its corruption."24

His suffering was revealed in a letter from December 1831, describing his "immense solitude." He saw Paris as a "moral desert," and a "foreign land." Comparing the city to Babylon and Lyon to Zion, Ozanam added, "Paris displeases me because there is no life, no faith, no love to be found. It is like a vast cadaver to which I feel myself as a young and lively person unwillingly attached. Its coldness chills me and its corruption wounds me."25

Like Jules Vallès twenty years later, though for different reasons, Frédéric Ozanam revolted against the common expressions of student sociability which he found unbearable. For his part, Vallès denounced the childish and ridiculous character of the young provincial men who played the role of being Parisian students, spending their time occupied with the vulgar activities of dancing, drinking, flirting, and playing billiards.26 Ozanam, for his part, saw an incompatibility of this lifestyle with his own moral and religious principles. The first letter Frédéric addressed to his mother, two days after his arrival in Paris, summarized all his complaints about his boarding house.27 He carefully listed them in a way designed to play on maternal sentiment for his coming proposal to move. He noted that his observance of religious fasting made him the object of repeated teasing from the other residents who were "neither Christians nor Turks" — furthermore (in a decisive argument for a mother) the food was less plentiful than promised. In addition, everyone played cards in the evening. Twice Frédéric was invited to join the game, which he refused. Finally, he noted "the company is not good; there are women and girls who also board here, who eat with us, and who dominate the conversation which in tone and content is extremely common. In the evening, from my room two floors above theirs, I hear them bursting out in laughter that you would expect from women in the marketplace." Beyond that, he mentioned "the most filthy jokes," "that you would expect to hear in the guardroom and scandalous columns."28 He was able to suggest a solution to the problem. André Ampère, a relative of

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24 Frédéric Ozanam to Pierre Balloffet, 10 December 1831, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 41, p. 64.
25 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 18-29 December 1831, Ibid., n° 42, p. 68.
26 See, outside of Bachelier where Vallès/Vingtras explains the difference, the Souvenirs d’un étudiant pauvre (Paris: Gallimard, 1930; and Tusson, Reed, Du Lerot, 1993).
27 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 7 November 1831, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 37, pp. 53-56.
28 Frédéric Ozanam to his father, November 1831, Ibid., n° 40, p. 61.
his father's, had offered accommodations at his home for the same price as the hated boarding house. This solution provided the guarantee of good company, a spacious room, a rich library, quality food, and a location (rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor) near the law school. The issue was quickly resolved, and he moved at the end of the month. Frédéric stayed with the Ampères until the spring of 1833, then rented a room in a hotel frequented by Lyonnais students (l'hôtel des Écoles, rue des Grès).

Ozanam quickly fell in with other members of the Lyonnais colony living in Paris. He cultivated close connections with members of this "country" network — although he sometimes found them a bit intrusive. This group included not just friends but relatives of his father, and Lyonnais clergy. He entertained his compatriots on the occasion of Carnival, offering punch and ice cream at a party where they mocked the bourgeoisie tendency of the Constitutionnel.29 And, as good Lyonnais, they even brought out the marionettes for entertainment.

Like almost all university students at the time, Ozanam came from the middle classes or the bourgeoisie. Poorer students, or those who had broken ties with their family, had to work to support themselves: giving private lessons, bookkeeping, contributing to the encyclopedias, or, most often, working as a school monitor, or as a tutor in the colleges, lycées, or for wealthy families. Louis Pasteur and Jules Vallès, for different reasons, each had to partially finance their studies in this way. But the majority of students depended totally on paternal funding. Sometimes additional aid could also

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29 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 24 February 1835, ibid., n° 91, p. 169.
be discretely obtained from the women of the family: a mother, an aunt, or a sister, as in the case of Flaubert. However, in general, students had to report their spending to their parents and ask for additional funds as necessary. Pasteur sent his father detailed records of his expenses and spending, like a tenant farmer reporting to the property-owner.

Ozanam, in response to his father’s expectations, maintained a precise account of his spending, including .50 fr. for lip ointment, .30 fr. for the bus “on a day it was raining,” and .50 fr. for a pastry on a day he did not return to the boarding house in time for dinner. He asked his father, with great deference, “for a small personal allowance as he had been given in Lyon: ‘I need some entertainment. It is so sad to be alone.’”30 His father, all the while complaining of the “financial consumption” afflicting his son,31 submitted with good grace to his request, adding 20 fr. to the 100 allocated monthly. Frédéric promised he would heat his room as sparingly as possible, and would use some of the money to give alms to the poor (“There are so many!”).32 He preferred to receive cash rather than items like “grosse culottes,” which as a good son he thanked his mother for sending. One is reminded of Jules Vallès, who received a green coat with a yellow vest sent by his mother from Nantes.33 He could also count on provisions sent regularly by his attentive and worried mother. However, he contributed to his own support as well, writing articles in the Revue européenne (one on religious beliefs in China in September 1833, and two on religious doctrines in India in December 1833 and January 1834), as well as in l’Université catholique where, with the support of the Oratorians of the College of Juilly, former followers of Lamennais like Olympe-Philippe Gerbet, Charles de Coux, and Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont gathered. In great demand, Ozanam even turned down a fairly large sum of money (1,200 francs, representing ten months of his allowance) from two men wanting him to join a project and publish a newspaper.34

Morality and Politics

Ozanam did not take morality lightly: during the cholera outbreaks in 1832, he said that the debauchery of medical students was the cause of their high mortality, ignoring the fact that many died through their care of patients struck with the disease. He thought that Paris had been chastised in order “to

30 Frédéric Ozanam to his father, 12 November 1831, Ibid., n° 38, p. 57.
31 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 26 May 1832, Ibid., n° 47, p. 81.
32 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 23 December 1831, Ibid., n° 42 bis, p. 71.
34 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 24-25 December 1833, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 65, p. 117.
punish our guilty city,” whose vagabonds formed a “race of damned men,” and whose women were hideous shrews. This did not prevent Frédéric and his Catholic friends from visiting cholera victims. However, he made no mention of these visits in his correspondence with family. He did not believe in celebrating the Carnival season. He observed with disdain the “masquerade balls, each more absurd than the next.” He was not amused by people dressing up as King Louis-Philippe complete with umbrella, syringe, and chamber pot, or of the giant, pear-shaped caricatures of the king displayed on the streets, or of dances, and students who stayed out all night celebrating. There are no references in his correspondence to his having attended a single theatre performance, not even the Théâtre-Français. The young man had promised his mother he would stay away from the stage. With few other outlets, he was obsessed with his family, and complained to his mother regularly about his physical problems (frequent stomachaches) and more still of his loneliness, his melancholy, and his doubts.

Ozanam cut himself off from the dominant social environment of the student, yet was also unsatisfied with the lifestyle he had chosen. His personal austerity seems extreme for a young man of roughly twenty years of age. Even his circle of friends no longer satisfied him. In his numerous letters he became a moralist, worried as much about the moral divergences of his friends as their political divergences. The correspondence he exchanged with Auguste Materne, a childhood friend, clearly shows a growing distance between Frédéric, who was attached to a vibrant faith as well as to its defense (even to the cult of the Bourbon dynasty overthrown in July 1830), and Materne, whom he sadly judged was becoming almost a republican and distancing himself from the faith. He accused Claude Huchard and Hippolyte Fortoul of succumbing to the charms of Paris; even the faithful Ernest Falconnet, his friend and cousin, was regularly given moral advice to not allow himself to be dragged to parties, dances, excesses of pleasure, and other such “stupefying joys.” Ozanam noted that “the world is an iron file that wears down young lives.” He eagerly, tactfully, and firmly assumed the role of spiritual advisor whenever he felt a friend was straying from the principles of Christian morality; he purposely adopted a sermonizing tone in these instances.

While still in Lyon, Ozanam expressed some interest in politics.

35 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 8 April 1832, Ibid., n° 45, p. 77.
37 Frédéric Ozanam to his father, 12 February 1834, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 69, pp. 126-127.
38 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 7 January 1834, Ibid., n° 67, p. 123.
Without excusing the Polignac government's anti-liberal politics he applauded the expedition to conquer Algeria, partly in the name of patriotism, partly in the name of religion. He described “the secret motive of Providence which, by the destruction of Islam in Africa, will open a path to civilization in that unfortunate country.” Moreover, at the age of only seventeen, he declared himself “a faithful subject of the legitimate king Charles X.” He dismissed the provisional government and the Duke of Orléans, and saw the Revolution of 1830 as an ensemble of illegal acts. Eight months after the change of dynasties, he still called himself a “Carlist” and talked of the “usurpation,” and later as a student in Paris, spoke further of the “July bandits.” Moreover, he complained of government surveillance of schools and lectures, and of how Catholic students were on the one hand “accused of being zealots” by impious students, and on the other of being liberals “by the old men.” Very early on, he protested against what he conceived to be the anti-Catholic policies of the new government. He believed, like L'Avenir, that Catholicism was the brother of liberty not of despotism. He also praised the Church’s acts of charity on behalf of the poor.

In the face of the effects of the cholera epidemic, Ozanam had a profound conviction of a coming social struggle. He thought Europe, “caught in the net of Freemasonry,” would witness a civil war which he predicted was imminent. He did not fear this struggle because he believed that Catholicism would emerge victorious, and would successfully reorient western civilization. In addition, Ozanam was not cut off from either social realities, nor from political combat. In January 1831, he made reference to Saint-Simonism, noting that it had not taken hold in Lyon — whether this observation was true or not, in the same year, he published Réflexions sur la doctrine de Saint-Simon, a critical booklet that contained two articles that had previously appeared in Le Précurseur. Both Lamartine and the journal L'Avenir praised these works.

Living in Paris, Frédéric did not witness the Canut worker revolts in Lyon, but his father published a booklet on L'Histoire de Lyon pendant le journées
Though calling for reconciliation and humane treatment, Doctor Ozanam severely criticized Louis Bouveir-Dumolart for having forgotten that “authority cannot and should not intervene in the regulation of private interests; that it is impossible to impose conditions on industry, daughter of liberty; and that competition and particular interests alone suffice to regulate the role that labor should play in the economy of textile production.” It is a classic statement of liberal economic orthodoxy.

As for Frédéric, following the days of June 1831, he noted with satisfaction: “Sieh da den Saint-Sinomismus schläft von dem Schlafen der Todten.”

As a student in Paris during the tremors of the first years of the new Orleanist regime, Ozanam stayed out of organized political activities. However, he could not completely avoid involvement in contemporary events. He recalled that once, as he was returning from class, he was recognized as being a student by a member of the national guard and threatened with death. While affirming that he “did not get mixed up with those noisemakers,” he declared his revulsion for the July Monarchy, which had “made it fashionable to attack students” and “which strove to deceive the people about its true nature.” In December 1831, student protests in support of Polish independence reached their climax, and Frédéric accused the government of paying “thugs” to brutally break them up. In the republican insurrection of June 1832, Ozanam saw the potential for a civil

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45 Lyon: Auguste Baron; and Paris: Moutardier, 1832.
46 Ibid., p. 16.
47 “See how Saint-Simonism sleeps the sleep of the dead”; Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 15 July 1831, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 48, p. 84.
48 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 23 December 1831, Ibid., n° 42 bis, p. 71.
war that, in contrast to the events of July 1830, would not set people against soldiers, but rather citizens against each other. He accused the government of having established a policy of vengeance by creating a state of siege and censorship.  

If he was worried about the events that took place in April 1834 in Lyon, he was distressed about the massacres that took place in Paris (rue Transnonain) and compared them to the Terror of 1793. But, in general, Ozanam observed a complete silence about the recurring agitation that took place in the Latin Quarter between 1831 and 1834. He also did not have anything to say about contemporary literary movements, romanticism (even if he said he had read Alessandro Manzoni, Walter Scott, and Alphonse de Lamartine), the revival of interest in the Middle Ages, the fashion of wearing "Robespierre" vests, the somewhat juvenile activities of les bousignots, or the Jeunes-France which Paul Gavarni drew with such skill.

One personal encounter during this period, however, did profoundly affect Frédéric: his introduction to Alphonse de Lamartine, at his Saint-Point chateau, in the autumn of 1834. Ozanam also frequented Lamartine's Parisian poet's salon and listened with amazement to his speeches in the Chamber of Deputies. He saw evidence of both genius and virtue in the author of the Méditations and the Harmonies. This view lasted only until the poet's Voyage en Orient was published. Ozanam criticized him for "having praised the Koran of Mohammed and, for his sense of optimism and tolerance." Ozanam, the ardent Catholic student, thought Lamartine had departed from orthodox belief, but conceded that he could not yet be judged to have gone as far as "formal apostasy."

Simultaneously, when Jules Michelet started publishing his Histoire de France, Frédéric also came out in defense of the Middles Ages, determined to alter what he considered to be the erroneous negative view of this era as being an archaic time of darkness. At the same time literature and theatre (Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, etc.) began to look to the Middle Ages as a reference point for a romanticism that purposely cultivated a sense of anachronism. The Middle Ages were held up as the antithesis of

49 Frédéric Ozanam in Italian to Ernest Falconnet, 15 July 1831, Ibid., n° 48, p. 83.
50 Rue Transnonain was the spot of the massacre of an entire Parisian household — nineteen men, women, and children — by the French National Guard in response to the April 1834 insurrections. It was said a shot had been fired from the house.
51 On all these points, see Jean-Claude Caron, Générations romantiques. Les étudiants de Paris et le Quartier latin (1814-1851) (Paris: A. Colin, 1991); as witnesses, see Gavarni, Œuvres choisies. Les étudiants (Paris: Hotzel, 1846); Augustin Challamel, Souvenirs d'un hugolâtre. La génération de 1830 (Paris: J. Levy, 1885); Champfleury, Souvenirs et portraits de jeunesse (Paris, 1872).
52 Frédéric Ozanam to Ferdinand Velay, Lettres, vol. 1, n° 96, p. 180.
modernity. In the Latin Quarter, whose institutional structures remained largely medieval, this opposition was more than just being fashionable; it became a form of resistance to the values of the new industrial age ready to caricaturize — and even ignore — the spiritual wealth of medieval times.

On the basis of a shared patriotism, though from different perspectives, Michelet and Ozanam both worked to rehabilitate the perception of the Middle Ages. This was not a passing infatuation for the young Catholic student; all his adult life would be marked by strong adherence to a medieval Christian spirituality which he nurtured with militant action.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

Following the French Revolution the Church attempted to convince young people, notably in university towns, to join Christian organizations. As Gérard Cholvy has noted, this was part of an effort “to win back the social elites.” In Marseille, Bordeaux, Paris, Lyon, and Montpellier, organizations lead by clerics or laymen tried more or less successfully to attract Catholic youth. The most famous and successful experiment was the Société des Bonnes Études, founded in Paris in 1822 with the support of the Count of Artois (the future Charles X) and Monseigneur Denis-Luc Frayssinous (the university’s grand chancellor). Its goal was to organize Catholic students and fight against liberal influence. Other efforts of the Society included the creation of a library (with the support of the Société des Bons Livres) — and public lectures. One speaker was Victor Hugo, who spoke on the occasion of the birth of the “miracle child.” The Society had provincial branches (such as those in Toulouse and Grenoble), but achieved only limited success.

Ozanam, as we have seen, remained loyal to the Bourbon dynasty. This did not, however, prevent him from being interested in, and enthusiastic about, the doctrines of Lamennais. As late as autumn of 1832 he believed the pope would support Lamennais’ positions, once they had been presented to him personally in Rome. He did not recognize the growing divergence between Lamennais and the Church until Paroles d’un croyant


54 The “miracle child” was Henri, comte de Chambord (b. 29 September 1820 – d. 24 August 1883), Duke of Bordeaux. Henri’s father, Charles Ferdinand, Duke of Berry, the son of the future king of France Charles X, was assassinated seven months before the birth of Henri, thereby leaving the future of the Bourbon dynasty in doubt. His birth, therefore, as a male heir to the throne, was considered a “miracle.” The July Revolution of 1830 ended any such hopes. Following the 2 August 1830 abdication of Charles X, Henri (or Henry V) claimed the throne for seven days before the National Assembly decreed Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orleans, King of the French.
appeared in spring of 1834. The condemnations of the encyclical *Mirari vos*, and this publication, led Henri Lacordaire, Olympe-Philippe Gerbet, Charles de Coux, and Charles de Montalembert to break definitively with Lamennais. Ozanam, for his part, criticized Lamennais’ opponents “who, by their despicable opposition had pushed this superb genius little-by-little down a path of anger and madness.” Ozanam nevertheless still held the conviction that liberty and faith in God were compatible. He summarized his position thus: “Opposition is useful, but not insurrection. Active obedience, passive resistance: the Prisons of S. Pellico, not les Paroles d’un croyant.”

Long before he ever considered creating a charitable organization, Ozanam was aware of the need “to show students that one can be Catholic and have common sense; that one can love both religion and liberty.” Before his departure from Lyon he expressed his desire to “form a group of like-minded friends to work together to build an edifice of science, under the banner of Catholic thought.” This project would be based on the model of the Société des Bonnes Études.

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55 Frédéric Ozanam to Charles Hommais, 7 May 1834, *Lettres*, vol. 5, n° 1346, p. 27.
56 A reference to *Le mie Prigioni [My Ten Years’ Imprisonment]* by the Italian writer and dramatist Silvio Pellico (b. 24 June 1789 – d. 31 January 1854). A patriot suspected to have ties to the Carbonari, Pellico was arrested by the ruling Austrians in 1820 and sentenced to death. The ruling was eventually commuted to imprisonment with hard labor. After his release in 1830, Pellico published his prison diary to much acclaim. The work is most notable for Pellico’s humanistic tone, relating his experiences and emotions in a voice devoid of anger or recrimination, finding strength through humility and his Catholic faith.
57 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 21 July 1834, *Lettres*, vol. 1, n° 77, p. 143.
58 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 10 February 1832, *Ibid.*, n° 43, p. 73.
ten people which he described as a “literary cavalry,” Ozanam eventually succeeded in attracting around sixty members (some were Catholics some were not) to a history and literature society where everything was open for discussion except politics — although the question of Saint-Simonism was broached.

Among those belonging to this small group in Paris was François Lallier, one of the founders of the charity conference and future author, in 1835, of the rules for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Other members included Paul Lamache, future law professor in Strasbourg and Grenoble, Pierre-Paul Chéruel, Gustave Colas de La Noue, and from Lyon: Amand Chaurand, Laguayte, and Pierre-Irénée Gignoux, as well as Ozanam’s cousin Henri Pessonneaux. This group, together with about thirty other Catholic students, joined Ozanam in attending the Corpus Christi procession at Nanterre. He was delighted to witness this popular devotion and was conscious of representing his social class with respect to the peasants, “so that they would see that the bourgeois were also capable of piety.”

A group of these young men also attended Christmas midnight mass together. Frédéric’s own faith was reinforced by a trip to Italy in the summer of 1833, the highlight of which was a visit to Rome with a private papal audience. The Ozanam family was also received by Cardinal Fesch, uncle to Napoleon and the archbishop of Lyon.

The foundation of the history and literature society just preceded the founding of a charity conference by Ozanam and seven others in April 1833, assisted by the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul — notably Jeanne-Marie Rendu, in religion, Sister Rosalie.

Frédéric’s letters are silent as to the details of the founding of the conference of charity. He only mentions the hesitation and doubt that racked him when, in the midst of his legal studies (which he undertook with little passion), he was asked to be “a sort of leader of the Catholic youth of this country.” Ozanam remained vague about who exactly this request had come from: “A number of notable young men granted me a respect of which I feel very unworthy, and a number of more mature men are helping me.” This was one of those rare times where the law student, at twenty-one years old, mentions the social, intellectual, and, in a broad sense, the political situation in Paris.

To encourage young members of the charity conference, Ozanam saw that the history and literature society provided a “foyer” which could be

60 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 19 June 1833, Ibid., n° 58, p. 106.
61 Frédéric Ozanam to Ernest Falconnet, 7 January 1834, Ibid., n° 67, p. 122.
used as an entrance to the charity conference.\textsuperscript{62} He realized it would not be an easy task to ask young Christian bourgeois to devote themselves with an almost charitable militancy, and personally assist poor families. Although the Latin Quarter was in geographic proximity to the poor there was a profound cultural distance between the members of these social classes.

In a way, Ozanam repeated Michelet’s challenge to the students at the Collège de France: to go to the people, take their gloves off, and become a mediating force in the city to head off social warfare.\textsuperscript{63} For Michelet, a young man naturally had more in common with others of his own age than with members of his social class \textit{per se}, and this connection represented a possible point of reconciliation between classes; towards the ultimate purpose of preserving the unity of the homeland. Michelet’s motivation was certainly not that of Ozanam’s, which was Christian morality. But one common point united the views of the two men: the idea that only action is moralizing, or, inverting the argument, that the only morality is action. Bourgeois youth, notably students, found themselves thus invested with a mission. For Ozanam, the mission was limited to the concrete application of Christian charity. But the conference itself would act as an “association of mutual encouragement” for the Catholic students of Paris who, “living in the midst of an impious and sensual crowd,” were like “migrating birds” threatened by the “vulture of incredulity.”\textsuperscript{64}

Ozanam drew up a balance sheet for the first months of the group’s activities. Thanks to donations and special collections 2,400 francs, and some books and clothes had been distributed to poor families. He anticipated that there would be more than a hundred members at the start of school in the autumn of 1834. Frédéric divided the conference, which he referred to as a Charitable Society, into a number of sections, presided over by Joseph-Emmanuel Bailly de Surcy, who was director of the \textit{Revue européenne}, the journal of the Catholic mennaisiens.

Very quickly, replicas of the Parisian conference of charity were created throughout the country; one of the first was founded in 1834 in Nîmes by Léonce Curnier, a friend of Ozanam. In 1836 the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, which had adopted its rules the year before, numbered five conferences (two in Paris, one in Nîmes, one in Lyon, and one in Rome) with

\textsuperscript{62} Frédéric Ozanam to Emmanuel Bailly, 3 November 1834, \textit{Ibid.}, n° 81, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{63} Jules Michelet, \textit{L’Étudiant} (Paris: Le Seuil, 1970); Reed, in \textit{Cours au Collège de France} (Paris, 1995), v. II, pp. 251-402; In the winter of 1847-48 Michelet’s planned-for series of lectures was suppressed by François Guizot and the French government, primarily due to his provocative rhetoric and democratic sympathies. The texts were eventually allowed to be published; see also \textit{Le Peuple}, appearing in 1846.
\textsuperscript{64} Frédéric Ozanam to Léonce Curnier, 4 November 1834, \textit{Lettres}, vol. 1, n° 82, p. 154.
two hundred fifty members, including around two hundred in Paris. Among its members were numerous personalities like Jacques-Philippe Binet, an astronomy professor at the Collège de France, and Antoine-Marie Demante, a professor in the law faculty.

In Paris, the conference distributed around 4,000 francs a year to three hundred poor families (reminiscent of Balzac's description in *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* of the work of the Frères de la Consolation directed by Madame de Chanterie). It also opened a printing apprenticeship program which instructed and housed ten poor children, the majority of whom were orphans. At the request of the president of the civil tribunal of Paris, members of the Society also visited and tutored delinquent children detained at the request of their parents — "a wholly unappreciated work... these little wretches are, for the most part, corrupted to their very cores." Other members proselytized amongst the poor, encouraging baptisms and the regularization of marriages. Frédéric himself was delighted by the conversion of a poor sick Protestant to Catholicism. When he returned to Lyon, Ozanam naturally sought to found a Saint Vincent de Paul conference, even though this met with some opposition even from within the Church.

"You keep the evidence of your passage through the Latin Quarter all your life," wrote Jules Vallès. Frédéric Ozanam proved him right; the rest of his short life was profoundly marked by his years of study. The education he received, in the University and beyond, made him a scholar concerned with reconciling science, liberty, and faith. His personal commitment to the University came before 1850, when the institution became an issue of harsh confrontation between the Church and anti-clerical forces. Ozanam entered into combat as an intellectual (before there was a name for it) against the likes of Jules Michelet, Edgar Quinet, and Victor Cousin. The precocity of his talents, expressed throughout the letters of his youth, coupled with a broad education, was put to the service of a single goal: the triumph of Catholicism. That said, Ozanam was capable of intolerance, even prejudice when it was an issue of Church dogma, upon which he would never compromise. He understood the importance of the combat of ideas which the industrial revolution was engendering. First in Lyon and then in Paris,

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65 *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* [The Seamy Side of History] is a novel in Honoré de Balzac's epic multi-volume work *La Comédie humaine*. The story, in part, tells the tale of a young man from the provinces, Godefroid, who comes to Paris to study law and becomes lost amidst the excesses of the city, the bourgeois, and his own ambition. Ultimately, he finds salvation through Madame de Chanterie, an aristocratic dowager who runs the charitable Frères de la Consolation, joining their work in aiding the poor and unfortunate of Paris and giving himself to the Catholic faith.

66 Frédéric Ozanam to his mother, 23 July 1836, *Lettres*, vol. 1, n° 121, p. 220.

he was confronted with the misery of the proletariat, but he was no less a
man of order and submission for it, especially in his relations to the Church
and its leader; though he perceived the risk that the Church was running in
remaining deaf to the idea of liberty, and even more so to that of equality.

In the Latin Quarter, which after 1841 he would not leave again,
he first utilized writing and oratory as his only weapons, then charity was
added. In 1848, he believed briefly that reconciliation of the Catholic faith
and liberty was possible; he quickly became disillusioned. At the end of
the day, in reading the young student’s correspondence, which is much
more “telling” than the hagiographic essays written after his death, one
perceives behind the reiteration of his certainties the depth of the doubts
that assailed him; they were as much about his own worth, as an individual,
as on the mission that he had assigned himself. During these years in the
Latin Quarter, Ozanam sometimes expressed the sentiment of being a small
island in the middle of an ocean of incredulity. He could not understand that
others of his generation did not see the Christian faith as the philosophy of
the future. L’Avenir, for its part, precisely captured this shattered hope of the
liberal catholic youth of 1830, it was a bereavement Frédéric Ozanam carried
the rest of his life.