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Pioneer and Prophet: Frédéric Ozanam's Influence on Modern Catholic Social Theory

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Dozens of books and articles recognize Antoine Frédéric Ozanam as one of the earliest and most prolific influences on the body of literature known as Catholic social theory[1]. Thomas A. Shannon credits Ozanam with being one of a number of Catholic social reformers appearing on the scene in France in the early nineteenth century, who "critiqued the law of supply and demand and the so-called iron law of wages because they degraded the worker"[2]. The "Right Reverend New Dealer"[3], John A. Ryan goes even further in the book he wrote with Joseph Husslein, *The Church and Labor*, and names Ozanam along with Bishop Wilhelm Von Ketteler[4] as one of the "two great precursors in our modern Catholic social movement"[5]. Albert de Mun, a Catholic social reformer in the late nineteenth century[6], calls Ozanam's Society of St. Vincent de Paul "the great school of experience in which we first learned to serve

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[1] Variously referred to as "Catholic social thought" and "Catholic social teaching".

[2] Thomas A. Shannon, "Rerum Novarum", in Kenneth R. Himes, et al., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 131.

[3] This was the epithet used to describe Ryan by Charles Coughlin. Ryan took the insult as a complement and would regularly refer to himself with this term later in his life.

[4] The theoretical connections between Ozanam and Von Ketteler are also mentioned in Melvin Williams, "Catholic Sociological Theory – A Review and Prospectus", *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, vol. 4, no. 3 (October 1943), 139.

[5] John A. Ryan - Joseph Husslein, *The Church and Labor* (New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 1.

[6] De Mun is mentioned in numerous works alongside Ozanam. See, for instance, C. Joseph Neuss, "Thomas Joseph Bouquillon (1840-1902), Moral Theologian and Precursor of the Social Sciences in the Catholic University of America", *The Catholic Historical Review* 72:4 (October 1986), 617.

the cause of the people. Out of them sprang the whole Catholic Social Movement of the 19th Century"[7]. In fact, it was members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, like Guiseppe Toniolo, professor of political economy at the University of Paris, who were consulted for technical assistance by Pope Leo XIII as his team drafted *Rerum Novarum*[8].

Evidence for Ozanam's influence on Catholic social thought is both copious and compelling; however, there is relatively little recent analysis of his life and work in academic theological literature. In English, the bulk of the literature is dedicated to pious hagiographic biographies, most of which were written early in the last century. There are also a few serious historical works, most notably Thomas Auge's outstanding *Frédéric Ozanam and His World*[9]. Very valuable collections of his writings also exist in English, like Louis Baunard's, *Ozanam in His Correspondence*[10]. Nevertheless, scholars seeking to insert themselves into an ongoing critical academic dialogue about Ozanam's life and work will find precious slim pickings, at least insofar as these discussions are being carried out in the English language.

It is my intention with this modest essay to begin a contextual theological analysis of some key elements of Ozanam's beliefs and practices, especially as these influence the birth of Catholic social theory and its subsequent developments. More specifically, this article is going to focus on two facets of Ozanam's thought that will either directly influence, or indirectly prefigure seismic shifts in the way the Catholic Church thinks about itself and the social, political, and economic worlds it inhabits.

The first facet has to do with practical theology and the preferential option for the poor. Ozanam was one of the earliest of the nineteenth-century Catholic Action reformers who claimed that Christian discipleship demanded direct involvement in the critical issues facing French society. The Church, according to Ozanam, should not be standing on the sidelines, or worse, allying itself with oppressive and anachronistic powers that were perpetuating the suffering of the people. He was also convinced that this call to discipleship was not reserved for a few elite

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[7] Albert de Mun quoted in Rev. Henry Louis Hughes, *Frederick Ozanam* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1933), 53.

[8] David L. Gregory, "Antoine Frédéric Ozanam: Building the Good Society", *Legal Studies Research Paper Series*, Paper #10-0029, October 2005. Found online at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=827389#%23 (accessed 2 June 2010).

[9] Thomas Auge, *Frédéric Ozanam and His World* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966).

[10] Louis Baunard, *Ozanam in His Correspondence* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005).

individuals who constituted a professional clerical class within a larger, passive Church, but rather, was a call that went out to all Christians, sacerdotal or lay. Service to the poorest of the poor was, for Ozanam, the clearest and most compelling sign of Christ's presence in the life of the Church. This kind of service was not something that could be accomplished by proxy, as if Christians could hire this task out to someone else. It was the kind of service that required direct immersion by all Christians in the lives of the poor and suffering.

The second facet of Ozanam's thought examined in this essay is methodological and concerns his use of an historical hermeneutic to interpret the appropriate standpoint of the Church towards a rapidly changing and seemingly hostile world. I will relate Ozanam's utilization of this historical hermeneutic to later developments in Catholic social theory, like Pius XI's implicit recognition of doctrinal development in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*[11], and John Courtney Murray's construction of an historical hermeneutic to explain the trajectory of Catholic social thought and begin his lifelong defense of religious liberty.

This discussion will conveniently lead into the final facet of Ozanam's thought that will be analyzed in this article, which is his support of religious liberty. Ozanam's defense of religious liberty was part and parcel of his larger commitment to liberalism and democracy. It was Ozanam's conviction that liberal democratic notions of religious liberty were not only not detrimental to the Catholic Church, but actually could benefit the Church overall if these ideas were embraced by the hierarchy. At the time, of course, the Church endorsed only the confessional state – one that established Catholicism as the official religion of the state[12]. Ozanam argued convincingly for a pluralist vision of

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[11] Pope Pius XI, *Qaudragesimo Anno*, para. 40. Found online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html (accessed 10 February 2010). "Yet since in the course of these same years, certain doubts have arisen concerning either the correct meaning of some parts of Leo's Encyclical or conclusions to be deduced therefrom, which doubts in turn have even among Catholics given rise to controversies that are not always peaceful; and since, furthermore, new needs and changed conditions of our age have made necessary a more precise application of Leo's teaching or even certain additions thereto, We most gladly seize this fitting occasion, in accord with Our Apostolic Office through which We are debtors to all, to answer, so far as in Us lies, these doubts and these demands of the present day".

[12] For more information about the Catholic Church and the confessional state see, John Conley, "*Dignitatis humanae* and the Catholic Society: The Confessional State as a Perennial Possibility", in Peter A. Pagan Aquiar - Terese Auer (eds.), *The Human Person and a Culture of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association: Distributed by Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

religious liberty using a logic that foreshadowed the one used successfully by John Courtney Murray more than a century later[13], which would eventually find its way into official Church teaching by way of Murray's drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty at Vatican Council II[14].

Historical Background

The Catholic hierarchy's class alliance, and occasional interchangeability with the elite social, political, and economic classes of Western Europe began during the final centuries of the Roman Empire and deepened throughout the Middle Ages. In France, the Reformation and the Enlightenment eroded the power of the *ancien régime* – the feudal monarchs and the privileged aristocratic classes of the Valois and Bourbon dynasties, who believed themselves to be rulers of the masses by divine fiat. Although the Church did embrace some version of reform at the Council of Trent after decades of stubborn denial that its policies and practices had become increasingly corrupt and intolerable; it, nevertheless, continued to cling to its old alliances with the aristocratic classes for centuries to come. By the time Ozanam arrived in Paris in the early nineteenth century, this unholy alliance was slowly beginning to unravel as Western Europe took its final steps away from feudal monarchical governance and towards constitutional democratic states[15].

Of course, during Ozanam's era (1813-1853), France was still reeling from the upheavals of the French Revolution (1789) and the relatively short, but traumatic, reign of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (1804-1814). Because of its very cozy and public affiliation with the royal family of Louis XVI, and to the feudal aristocratic class in general, the Catholic Church naturally became a target of the revolutionaries in 1789[16]. The memory of those days of panic, fear, and persecution at the hands of the bloody Jacobin executioners still lingered for the Church two generations later when Ozanam began his academic career. If anything, the Church in the early 1830's had become even more entrenched in its alliance with the royal family and the landed aristocracy[17].

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[13] For more information see, Keith Paclischek, *John Courtney Murray and the Dilemma of Religious Toleration* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1994).

[14] See: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (accessed 11 December 2011).

[15] Gregory, "Building the Good Society", 7.

[16] Auge, *His World*, 6.

[17] *Ibid.*, 6-7.

The Revolution was France's first flirtation with republican governance, but not its only, or last. This chaotic and fragile experiment would come to an end when Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor, thereby, at the same time, challenging papal authority over royal appointments. After Napoleon, the monarchy was restored and remained in place until 1848, when France would once again enjoy a brief period of republican rule. However, four years later Napoleon's nephew would take the emperor's throne and not relinquish it until the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 when France would finally end the monarchy and permanently establish democratic rule[18].

Given this admittedly sketchy overview of French history, it is still clear that Ozanam lived during a liminal period that had already tasted the forbidden fruits of self-rule, but had not yet entirely shed the last vestiges of monarchy and aristocratic dominance. For this reason, French society during the early-to-mid-nineteenth century was fundamentally divided[19]. There were many who desired to live under a republican government that was constitutionally secular and independent of Catholic oversight and meddling. On the other hand, there were powerful and entrenched forces that thrived in the established context of a medieval aristocratic government allied, as it was, with the moral authority and historical constancy of the Catholic Church. It was, therefore, often very unclear to Catholic liberals like Ozanam how to appropriately divide their loyalties, or whether or not their loyalties really needed to be divided. A few visionaries like Ozanam eventually realized that one could be a faithful Catholic and still embrace liberal political structures and causes.

When Ozanam arrived in Paris in 1831 at the age of 18, the Catholic Church was viewed by a majority of his professors and peers at the University of Paris as hopelessly conservative and mired in medieval nostalgia[20]. Universities like Paris and the Sorbonne were seedbeds for liberal democratic philosophies and progressive political organization. Catholicism, therefore, was openly reviled and denounced as anachronistic in almost every venue imaginable[21]. Lectures in Paris, in a variety of disciplines, normally included some mention of the ways in which the Church had been a detrimental influence on society and the individual, and how modern French society needed to liberate itself from this stifling and oppressive ecclesial yoke.

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[18] Gregory, "Building the Good Society", 30.

[19] Scott P. Kelley, "Subsidiarity and Global Poverty: Development from Below Upwards", *Vincentian Heritage (Special Issue on Vincentian Higher Education and Poverty Reduction)* 28:2 (2008), 162.

[20] Auge, *His World*, 8.

[21] Gregory, "Building the Good Society", 8.

Ozanam entered this fray and quickly distinguished himself as an articulate defender of the Church, not as an institution permanently entangled in deteriorating medieval structures, but rather, a Church that reached out to the people, seeking bonds of solidarity and embracing the rule of all by all[22]. It turned out that this was a fortuitous moment for Ozanam to make such an argument as the popular Louis-Philippe had just ascended the throne in 1830 and immediately instituted modest policies of self-rule for local governments[23]. This cast the monarchy and its allied Church in a new and more flattering light among liberals and the intellectual class. Over the next eighteen years, until the revolutions of 1848, Ozanam would take advantage of these positive contextual resources in order to plant some of the first seeds that would eventually blossom into the Church's social theory some sixty years later.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Ozanam was an exceptional young man in many respects, and his biographers spill gallons of ink instilling in their readers this sense of his unusual intelligence, boundless ambition, and sincere piety. Soon after arriving in Paris, he distinguished himself both in the classroom and in extracurricular debates as a formidable intellectual force, who combined encyclopedic knowledge with incisive logic and unparalleled reasoning skills[24]. He also quickly assumed a leadership role among a minority of Catholic students who were keen to defend their faith in this hostile and oppositional climate[25]. Ozanam had a burning passion for intellectual debate, and this hunger drove him to organize colloquia in which he could engage faculty and fellow students in lively discussions concerning a very wide ranging sample of topics. With the help and mentoring of his good friend Emmanuel Bailly, the editor of *La Tribune Catholique*, who agreed to act as host, Ozanam gathered a group of scholars for regular ongoing debates in what would become known as the Conference of History[26].

According to Ozanam's biographers, it was out of the debates of the Conference of History that the inspiration for the Society of St. Vincent

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[22] Auge, *His World*, 10, 83.

[23] Gregory, "Building the Good Society", 26.

[24] Auge, *His World*, 14-15.

[25] Shaun McCarty, S.T., "Frederick Ozanam: Lay Evangelizer", *Vincentian Heritage* 17:1 (1996), 7.

[26] Sister M. Eveline, O.P., "The Social Thought of Frédéric Ozanam", *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 2:1 (March 1941), 48.

de Paul first developed[27]. It quickly became the tradition of the Conference of History for the debates to ultimately settle on the relative merits of the Catholic faith in relation to whatever historical topic was being discussed. Ozanam and his compatriots would defend Catholicism, while other groups would represent the more mainstream intellectual position that the Church was generally a corrupt, oppressive and retrogressive force in history[28]. One fateful day, in the middle of one such debate, Ozanam was challenged by a fellow student to provide evidence that the Church was a benevolent force, to which he replied by reciting a litany of events in Church history that highlighted ways in which the Church had unequivocally made the world a better place. Ozanam's opponent was not satisfied and argued that the Church might have been a good force at one time, but questioned how it could be construed as a positive contemporary force. Ozanam answered by pointing to the many good and charitable works being done in the name of the Church by the clergy and the various religious orders. Finally, the student said, "Ozanam, Christianity has done wonders in the past, but what is it doing now in Paris for the poor? Show us what practical benefit the working man reaps from your religion and we too will believe in it"[29].

According to his biographers, Ozanam was silenced by this challenge and he convened a small group of Catholic scholars several days later in order to come up with a satisfactory answer this question[30]. "After this, the 'Conference of History' became the 'Conference of Charity' which eventually was named the 'Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul"[31]. Their response to the challenge came in concrete form through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a confraternity of lay Catholics who would visit poor, working-class families and perform charitable works, like delivering food and gathering fuel for wood-burning stoves. The purpose of the society was to give lay Catholics an opportunity to live out their vocation of discipleship to the poor. It also encouraged its membership to recognize the person of Christ in the poor they were serving[32]. Also, the Society gave members first-hand experience with the most miserable living situations in the realm, and therefore, served as a laboratory for erstwhile, comfortable intellectuals of the upper and

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[27] Albert Paul Schimberg, *The Great Friend: Frederick Ozanam* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946), 56-57.

[28] Baunard, *His Correspondence*, 56-57.

[29] Hughes, *Ozanam*, 51.

[30] Schimberg, *Great Friend*, 60-61.

[31] McCarty, "Lay Evangelizer", 8.

[32] James Patrick Derum, *Apostle in a Top Hat: The Life of Frédéric Ozanam* (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover House, 1961), 72.

middling classes to have direct experiences with those classes for whom they were claiming to be advocates[33]. For these reasons, the Society, while not quite yet a genuine option for the poor in the contemporary sense of the phrase, had certainly graduated beyond the distant, condescending and abstract approaches of the merely charitable associations common during Ozanam's day[34].

There are also other reasons that Ozanam's foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is important for both the birth of Catholic social thought sixty years later, and for the development of ideas about practical theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Most importantly, the foundation of the Society marked the beginning of what would become known as the Catholic Action movement, which eventually spread across Europe and North America and became one of the key elements in a Catholic renaissance among the laity in subsequent generations[35]. Essentially, Catholic Action and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were movements in which lay people felt inspired and were concretely empowered to take on roles which had been traditionally reserved for those who belonged to a kind of professional class of sisters, brothers, and priests evolved over the centuries[36]. Due to the fact that the Society and other Catholic Action movements began as charitable organizations, and because there was no scarcity of work to go around due to rampant and pervasive poverty in French society, there was very little quibbling, let alone organized opposition to these organizations on the part of the official Church.

However, at the same time, but in a very different vein, this type of organization was very much in the spirit of liberal democratic theory, which claimed that all people were competent to play essential social and political leadership roles from which they had been unjustly excluded by an elite class during the Middle Ages[37]. Certain groups of people in Western Europe, who had been content up until this time to passively allow a small privileged class to rule and manage all aspects

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[33] For a description of these conditions see, *Ibid.*, 64.

[34] John Looby, "Ozanam and Marx", *The Irish Monthly* 84, no. 964 (December 1953), 476-477.

[35] Hughes, *Ozanam*, 144.

[36] *Ibid.*, 143.

[37] It should be noted that many proponents of Catholic Action were erstwhile opponents of liberalism and democracy. See, Margaret Lyon, "Christian Democratic Parties and Politics", *Journal of Contemporary History* 69:2 (1967), 71. "In contrast to the socialists, who worked for both political democracy and social progress simultaneously, the first sponsors of the Catholic movements were alienated almost as much by the egalitarian aspects of democracy as by the atheism of continental socialism".

of society, were now taking matters into their own hands and establishing new ground rules for how decisions would be made and who would be in charge of executing those decisions. It turned out that this was as true for the society of the Church as it was for the larger civil society of France.

In many important ways, lay people in this Catholic context were analogous to the proletariat class that was being written about in the emerging egalitarian political and social theories of the day[38]. By organizing and acting on their own behalf and for the benefit of the dispossessed classes in society, they had nothing to lose but the chains of medieval class oppression. Therefore, the foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul can be characterized as something that is both fundamentally conservative, insofar as it was a charitable outreach to the poor, while, at the same time, it was also something that was radically progressive and disruptive to the status quo due to the fact that it organized lay people in a way that supplemented and supplanted those who occupied positions traditionally reserved for an elite religious class.

1848 and the New Era

For the sake of brevity and coherence, this article will focus on only two relatively short, but dramatic and productive periods in Ozanam's life. It is important to stress at this point that Ozanam produced theologically rich work throughout his life that would contribute bountifully to the nascent Catholic social movement. The reader should not conclude from the organization of his work in this essay that he was productive only during his college years and then again late in his life, and that he was otherwise silent or distracted.

During the fifteen years between the founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the outbreak of revolutions around Europe (approximately 1833-1848), Ozanam expended a great deal of time and energy in the academy. He finished his degree in law and suffered through a brief, though distinguished law career in Lyon before being brought back to the University of Paris by a friend and former professor to take oral and written examinations for a competitive appointment in literature[39]. To his own surprise, he won the competition and began a lifelong vocation as an academic in the discipline he cherished most, medieval literature. In his late 20's Ozanam experienced a period of questioning concerning his dilemma over whether to pursue the

[38] Looby, "Marx", 475-478.

[39] Auge, *His World*, 55.

priesthood or married life[40], which he finally put to rest by marrying Marie-Josephine-Amélie Soulacroix in 1841, and fathering his only child Marie in 1846[41]. Throughout this fifteen year period, he continued to shepherd the Society he helped found in his college years and watched it grow exponentially as it became an international, and then, eventually, a global movement[42]. In his role as the figurehead of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, he encountered and created alliances with a number of key figures in Catholic liberalism and the materializing Catholic Action movements. Some of his closest collaborators throughout his life were: François-René de Chateaubriand, neo-Catholic and pioneer of French Romanticism[43]; André-Marie Ampère, physicist and mathematician[44]; Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, a priest, journalist and political activist[45]; and Charles Forbes René de Montalembert, a publicist and historian[46].

To fully appreciate the importance of 1848 for Ozanam and Catholic social thought, one must begin by examining events in 1846 when Pius IX was elected Pope. This was an event that gave liberal Catholics enormous hope because everyone expected Pius IX to inaugurate an era of openness and reform[47]. This new Pope held very liberal views and his election was met with great fanfare in the streets of Rome. The new Pope was seemingly loved by all, and in his first few official pronouncements he did not disappoint as, to the consternation of conservative forces in the Vatican[48], he granted amnesty, reform of the civil and criminal code, and limited self-rule[49] to the citizens of the Papal States. Ozanam was elated by the election, and during a bout of illness he was sent to Italy by his doctor where he visited Rome and enjoyed an extended audience with the Pope on two separate occasions[50]. He reported that the Pope knew of the Society of St. Vincent

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[40] Schimberg, *Great Friend*, 123.

[41] Emmanuel Renner, *The Historical Thought of Frédéric Ozanam* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1959), 14.

[42] Auge, *His World*, 25.

[43] McCarty, "Lay Evangelizer", 16.

[44] Eveline, "Social Thought", 55.

[45] Auge, *His World*, 81.

[46] Baunard, *His Correspondence*, 280-290.

[47] *Ibid.*, 242.

[48] Roberto de Mattei, *Pius IX*, John Laughland, trans. (Herefordshire, U.K.: Gracewing, 2004), 21.

[49] Baunard, *His Correspondence*, 254.

[50] For more detail on this meeting see Kathleen O'Meara, *Frédéric Ozanam: Professor at the Sorbonne* (New York, N.Y.: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1911), 193-208.

de Paul and that he was pleased with the way it was invigorating the faith of lay people throughout the world. Ozanam returned to France convinced that the Church was well on its way to a thoroughgoing liberal reform[51].

Soon after Ozanam's return to France, in the first few months of 1848, liberal democratic revolutions broke out in France, Italy, and other parts of Europe[52]. In spite of the new liberal leadership of Pius IX, the Catholic Church was targeted by the revolutionaries because of his refusal to sever relations and declare war on Catholic Austria[53]. In France, the once popular Louis-Phillipe was deposed in disgrace as his administration was viewed as ineffectual and tainted by corruption[54]. In Rome, the Vatican was besieged by revolutionaries angered over Catholic Austria and because the Pope had not granted complete democratic self-rule in the Papal States. Riots broke out and revolutionaries attacked the Vatican. On 15 November 1848, Pius IX's close friend and secretary of state, Pellegrino Rossi was stabbed to death on his way up the Cancellaria[55]. Soon afterward, Jean-Baptiste Palma, a papal prelate, was shot in the head while standing at a window within the walls of the Vatican[56]. A few days later, the Pope was spirited away in an elaborate ruse, narrowly avoiding a similar fate. Pius IX lived in exile for the next year in Gaeta[57]. When he returned to the Vatican, he was a changed man who set about the task of halting all liberal reforms, and eventually condemned all versions of modern thought and political organization in the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, with its addendum, the *Syllabus of Errors*[58].

Meanwhile, in France, Ozanam was hard at work trying to defend liberalism and democracy as ideas that could still be held by faithful Catholics in spite of the damage done to the Church and its allies by the revolutionaries. Through the publication of a journal titled *The New Era*, Ozanam attempted to convince the Church that it should throw its influence behind the working class and the revolutionary forces, while, at the same time, trying to convince the revolutionaries that Catholicism was actually their ally in this fight for liberty[59]. In a series of articles

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[51] Derum, *Top Hat*, 172-173.

[52] Baunard, *His Correspondence*, 282-283.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Auge, *His World*, 34.

[55] Hughes, *Ozanam*, 87-88.

[56] De Mattei, *Pius IX*, 31.

[57] Owen Chadwick, *Oxford History of the Christian Church: A History of the Popes, 1830-1914* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93.

[58] Auge, *His World*, 120.

[59] McCarty, "Lay Evangelizer", 9, 27.

defending the separation of Church and State he made historical arguments that prefigure those made one hundred years later by John Courtney Murray and the Vatican II Declaration on Religious Liberty he drafted. Unfortunately for the future of Catholic social theory, Ozanam failed to convince either side that the other was their true friend in this conflict[60]. Ozanam and his compatriots achieved no reconciliation of any kind between the Church and the liberals, and the Church sank back into another extended, and more damaging period of conservatism and dependence on the waning aristocratic powers in Europe.

In spite of his failure to reconcile leaders of his Catholic faith tradition with revolutionary representatives espousing liberal democratic principles, Ozanam did leave future social Catholics with the important legacy of his historical hermeneutic – the conviction that historical context can influence Church teaching, and the simple yet subversive understanding that Church teaching develops over time[61]. Ozanam was a student of early medieval history, and he likened the Church's social and political situation to the one Christianity faced during the fall of the Roman Empire, when barbarian tribes were overrunning the seemingly impenetrable eastern borders and pouring into Roman-occupied lands in droves. Ozanam argued that the contemporary Church should take a lesson from the Church of that era and "leave Byzantium and go to the barbarians". He claimed the Church should:

> ...leave the camp of statesmen and Kings who are slaves to selfish and dynastic interests, who made the treaties of 1815, the Talleyrands, and the Metternicks, for the camp of the people and the nation. Go over to the people, is, following the example of Pius IX, to interest ourselves in the people, who have needs and no rights, who justly claim a larger part in the management of public affairs, who demand work and food; who do not read the *Histoire des Girondins*, who do not give banquets to reformers, and who most certainly do not dine at them; who do follow false guides, but for want of better. To go over to the people is to cease to play the part of the Mazzinis, of the Ochsenbeins and the Henri Heines, and to devote ourselves instead to the service of the mass of people, in rural as well as in urban areas. It is in that sense that to go over to the barbarians signifies to go over to the mass of people, but it is to withdraw them from their barbarity, to make them good citizens and good followers of Christ, to elevate them in morality and truth, to make them fit for, and worthy of the liberty of the children of God[62].

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[60] Baunard, *His Correspondence*, 291.
[61] *Ibid.*, 283-284.
[62] *Ibid.*, 255.

One hundred years later, John Courtney Murray would enlist the same kind of historical argument in order to affect a similar kind of liberal reconciliation between the Catholic tradition and the American political experiment[63]. Murray's context mirrors Ozanam's to the extent that both were trying to demonstrate that the Catholic tradition was not essentially hostile to liberalism, or even to the notion of the separation of Church and State. Both argued that the Church had mistakenly tied itself to an "invalid" monarchical conception of governance, and that it needed to free itself from this fateful alliance in order to regain credence in the eyes of the people[64]. Murray argued that a closer reading of Thomas Aquinas demonstrated that the great medieval scholastic would advocate a church-state doctrine more or less identical to the one written into the American Constitution[65]. Ozanam would argue that a closer reading of the early years of the Holy Roman Empire demonstrated that the Church would be better served by siding with the rebels than clinging desperately to the hopelessly anachronistic institutions of dying empires[66]. The main difference between Murray and Ozanam was that Murray faced much friendlier historical circumstances, and his argument eventually was enshrined in Church doctrine in the document on the "Declaration on Religious Liberty" at Vatican II.

The Catholic Church during Ozanam's era had not yet entertained the idea that its doctrine could possibly be conditioned by historical circumstances. Ozanam's advocacy for the development of doctrine was subtle, and it was possibly an element of his theology that even escaped the author's notice. However, by suggesting that the Church's alliance to medieval royal structures was merely an historical expedience, and that the Church should rethink its position in relation to modern political, economic, and social sensibilities, Ozanam was challenging the doctrine of the confessional state, which at the time would have been considered sacrosanct. His claim that the Church should embrace the modern concept of the separation of Church and State was tantamount to claiming that longstanding doctrines of the Church, even ones carrying the highest authority, were open to debate and change. This, of course, was not something the Church of his era was prepared to acknowledge.

By the middle of the next century, when Murray was making his doctrinal development arguments based on an analysis of Leo XIII's

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[63] JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960), 109.

[64] AUGE, *His World*, 87.

[65] MURRAY, *These Truths*, 295-336.

[66] BAUNARD, *His Correspondence*.

Rerum Novarum, the Church had taken a reactionary position against any liberal theologies claiming that the doctrine of the Church was not constant, and that the Church's social teaching, in particular, demonstrated significant development over time[67]. Murray was silenced for a number of years after the publication of the last in his series of articles in *Theological Studies*; however, less than a decade later he was asked to draft the Declaration on Religious Liberty at the Second Vatican Council. The idea that Church doctrine develops over time became mainstreamed implicitly in that moment, and although there is no direct evidence that Murray studied Ozanam's work extensively, he, nevertheless, paved the way for the kind of historical hermeneutic employed by Murray to ground his argument for religious liberty.

Conclusions

When most social theorists today discuss Frédéric Ozanam, they are rightfully drawn to his strong defense of wage justice, worker's associations, and the generally miserable plight of the working class. This focus makes perfect sense because these issues ultimately became central concerns of *Rerum Novarum* and subsequent Catholic social tradition. These issues also became part of a constellation of causes taken up during the progressive era of Western democratic capitalism and are now written into the laws of most developed nations. However, Ozanam's influence on Catholicism and Western culture runs deeper than his ardent advocacy for these key labor issues. In subtler and less explicit ways, Ozanam's method of historical argument, and his commitment to standing with the poor through direct experiences with the poorest of the poor, have an arguably more profound effect on future developments in the Catholic social tradition.

When Ozanam was challenged by his peers in the Conference of History to demonstrate how Catholicism was changing the lives of contemporary Frenchmen, he instinctively understood this as a challenge to both his own insulated and comfortable existence, as well as the Church's own aristocratically coddled position in French society. He interpreted the challenge as one that called him out to the dirty, garbage-strewn ghettos of Paris where he and his friends would encounter the very real human byproducts of industrial capitalism. He could

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[67] John Courtney Murray, "Leo XIII on Church and State: The General Structure of the Controversy", *Theological Studies* 14 (March), 1-30; "Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State", *Theological Studies* 14 (June), 145-314; "Leo XIII: Two Concepts of Government", *Theological Studies* 14 (December), 551-567; "Leo XIII: Two Concepts of Government: Government and the Order of Culture", *Theological Studies* 15 (March), 1-33.

have chosen to interpret this challenge differently. He could have taken the challenge as a call to be more pious, more liturgically oriented, or more involved in the political machinery of the Church and its relationship to the State of Louis-Phillipe. All of these would have been valid, even, in some ways, more likely responses to such a challenge. However, Ozanam chose an option for the poor instead, which resulted in an organization whose praxis was distinguished from other Catholic charitable outreaches of his day. Ozanam's option was one that would prefigure the kinds of preferential options called for a century later by liberation theologians[68], and eventually by the Pope himself[69].

Although Ozanam referred to his work as "charity" there are many ways that his vision for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul transcended mere charitable giving and foreshadowed the preferential option for the poor that later appears in Catholic social thought. Most importantly, Ozanam insisted on putting a human face to the otherwise distant and anonymous practice of charity. Ozanam's humanization of the poor anticipated the theme of human dignity in later Catholic social theory, demanding members to go out and meet poor families and, in so many ways, adopt them and make their struggles the struggles of the Society members. The Society's approach to the poor also anticipated the theme of solidarity in bringing together people of different classes who were artificially alienated from one another by sinful social, political, and economic structures, and giving them the opportunity of experiencing their genuine and deep filial bonds under their common divine parent[70]. With the common good constantly in mind as the distant goal of the Society, Ozanam forged an orthopraxis among the poorest of the poor in mid-nineteenth-century France that would impel the Church forward, away from medieval conceptions and towards a more mature approach embodied in the concept of poverty and charity and the preferential option for the poor[71].

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[68] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 130.

[69] Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Para 47. See: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html (accessed 11 December 2011).

[70] Hughes, *Ozanam*, 60.

[71] Benedict XVI stressed these aspects of the option for the poor contributing to the common good and universal solidarity in a recent address: Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Fathers of the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus" (Clementine Hall, Vatican City, 21 February 2008). See: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080221_gesuiti_en.html (accessed 11 December 2011).

In addition to his pioneering orthopraxis, his style of historical argumentation also anticipated critical theological advances – again, over one hundred years in the future. While Protestant theology became more sophisticated with its recognition of the historical development of Christian doctrine and practice early in the twentieth century[72], Catholic theology ran into the roadblock of Vatican resistance to such ideas, not lifted until the time of the Second Vatican Council. Immediately before Vatican II, a number of Catholic theologians began using an historical hermeneutic in order to explore the implications of doctrinal development[73]. Some of those theologians paid a steep price for their curiosity, as with the theology of John Courtney Murray, who was silenced for a number of years for demonstrating doctrinal development in papal social teaching. The arguments Murray was making were remarkably similar in structure to the ones Ozanam made in 1848 concerning how the Church only needed to look to its own history in order to discover inspiration for allying itself with democracy and the downtrodden, and to abandon its misguided attachment to its medieval aristocratic past. In a similar way, Murray claimed that the Church only needed to study its own Thomistic natural law tradition in order to find theoretical justification for the doctrine of the separation of Church and State.

Frédéric Ozanam is a pioneer in Catholic social theory for more reasons than his support for workers associations, living wages, and democratic structures. His Theological and practical commitments also foreshadow seismic shifts in Catholic social theory one hundred years into the future. In all aspects, Ozanam is both a pioneer and a prophet for modern Catholic social thought.

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[72] See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan Company, 1931).

[73] Murray was joined by other Catholic theological luminaries like Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and especially Marie-Dominique Chenu in their use of historical argument to support reform of Church teaching and practice.