

Ozanam Professor

Second broadcast about Ozanam, from Radio Notre Dame. Ozanam has become a teacher at the University. How did he manage to live his Catholic faith in a professional environment so deeply hostile to religion? In what way was he innovative in his commercial law course? Was Ozanam a liberal or a social Christian? The answers are in this second interview, an absolute must...

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Jean-Paul Clément: We are now in the company of Mme Mireille Beaup, and also in the company of the intercessor for this broadcast, Frédéric Ozanam himself. So we previously covered the context of the life of Frédéric Ozanam in broad terms, but we are now going to go into more detail. Just before this broadcast, you quoted a phrase which is very typical of Ozanam, and I would like you to repeat it for our listeners.

Mireille Beaup: Frédéric Ozanam was appointed Professor to replace Claude Fauriel at the Sorbonne in 1840, after being accepted first for accreditation. He held this temporary position until he was finally appointed as a full Professor in 1844. When he began teaching at the Sorbonne, the University was being challenged by a fringe of the Catholic Church, and Ozanam was reproached for choosing to teach at the University, which was a State monopoly against which the Church wanted to fight. So Ozanam found himself in a very delicate and difficult situation at that time. Conservative Catholics criticised him for being at the University at all. The University criticised him for being too Catholic, and so, at one point in 1843, perhaps the most difficult in this dispute between University and Church, Ozanam wrote the following to his father-in-law, none other than Rector Soulacroix who lived in Lyon. Referring to this dispute, he wrote the following words, as you mentioned. *“I am of the Church and University together, and I have unhesitatingly devoted my life to them, which will be truly fulfilled if it gives honour to God and serves the State. I want to reconcile these duties, however difficult it seems. I think I have partly succeeded when, in a public lecture, before an audience of all beliefs and of all parties, I can simply profess Christian knowledge. I believe this is the best response to those who accuse our chairs and pulpits.”*

Jean-Paul Clément: There you are. Because a number of conflicts arose at the time of the Restoration. I recall one in particular relating to a professor of law called Bavoux. And Bavoux, who taught law at Paris, held theories about natural law which arose from the conservative polemic. At that time, Chateaubriand led “Le Conservateur”, and was one of its directors with Villèle, Bonald and others. So there was a scandal at that time, and the University seemed, how can I put it? Something of a battleground, like, I don’t say where Voltaire ruled, but seemed to be a distressing place to be a Catholic. Is this true?

Mireille Beaup: What is true, what is very clear in Ozanam’s correspondence, is that he followed courses at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne, teaching courses, philosophy, history and literature courses, which were almost all anti-clerical. I think that at the Collège de France, teachers such as Michelet very openly attacked what they called “jesuitism” and so in fact the literature courses Ozanam would follow, either at the Sorbonne or at the Collège de France would make him aware that many of his future colleagues at the University were in conflict, having difficulties with the Catholic Church.

Jean-Paul Clément: I mentioned Voltaire previously, but at this time, during the July Monarchy, the works of Voltaire were being reprinted in significant quantities. There was a kind of powerful resurgence of Enlightenment thought, and Catholics actually found that this university, with the Napoleonic University monopoly, was in fact a rather unwelcoming place. And Ozanam clearly demonstrates - perhaps as a herald of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, that Faith and Science, scientific rigour, can be reconciled.

Mireille Beaup: Precisely. Because for Frédéric Ozanam, science is rigour and truth. He always said "I am at the service of the Truth", not at the service of a dogma. But if Truth is in accord with the dogma, I admire the dogma, speak about the dogma, accept the dogma, because of the Truth.

Jean-Paul Clément: There you are. This was no proselyte who entered the University. That's what's important.

Mireille Beaup: He always avoided proselytism. He loved the Church deeply. He followed and held to Christian orthodoxy, but at the same time, he was very open and very much wished to collaborate with people who thought differently from him.

Jean-Paul Clément: Could we define what Ozanam's faith actually was, because at this time, Romantic thinkers, even Christians, were often reproached for their leanings towards pantheism and for confusing God, humanity and nature together. God is transcendent. Human beings exist and are created by God. And then nature, often found in Vigny and Lamartine. Vigny speaks of "*stepmother nature*". There are a number of texts like that where a kind of pantheism appears. But his faith remained entirely orthodox..

Mireille Beaup: Quite right, he suffered a great deal from the estrangement of Lamartine, and Lammenais too, from the faith. Abbé Noiroi helped him a great deal in remaining within orthodox Christianity. Because there were many ideologies, new ideas, flying around, and every time, Abbé Noiroi gave him proper guidance. He said that Abbé Noiroi brought light and order into his ideas. Then there was this fortunate creation of the Conferences of Charity, which gave rise to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and there he was often in company with some very good clerics who kept him steady in his Christian faith. As you asked me what kind of Catholicism he had, what really interested him was love for the poor, a life of Charity, and not just a life of Charity with those in need, but also with colleagues, whether or not they were Catholics, with the students there, with his friends, and with journalists he met. That was his Catholicism: the triumph of Charity and the love of intelligence placed at the service of God's glory.

Jean-Paul Clément: That's it, because in fact we are looking at a period marked by a flourishing of industry (though lagging behind that of England), and the appearance of a working class in a country which nonetheless remained for the most part a rural, peasant economy. At the same time, however, around Paris and other large cities, industries were being established, and within these industries, an impoverished working class. I think that the uprising of the Canuts, the Lyon silk-workers in 1831 really struck him, and it was through helping the poor that he began the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul..

Mireille Beaup: That's where he started, and he succeeded in setting up a commercial law course in Lyon in 1839, which the city organised, on the fringes of the University. The commercial law course attracted craftworkers, industrialists and magistrates. Many people came to follow his course, although he said things which would be seen as new ideas, asking questions

about employment rights, the conditions of workers, the problem of rich and poor, conflicts which this could cause, violence in factories, poverty in rural areas, as well as in cities. This was one of his great concerns, which he would return to in 1848, during the Revolution, because he took sides precisely for these poor people, against social injustice, and that is why he established the journal "l'Ere Nouvelle", with Lacordaire, to try to defend what would later become a Christian democracy.

Jean-Paul Clément: And Lacordaire's famous Lent Conferences...

Mireille Beaup: With Lacordaire, the Lent Conferences were established, also a new idea for the time, where people came to find answers to all the questions being asked then.

Jean-Paul Clément: And Chateaubriand came to hear them. He greatly appreciated them.

Mireille Beaup: Absolutely.

Jean-Paul Clément: So next time, we will perhaps talk a bit about: Was Ozanam a liberal or a social Christian? You have answered one question which I was going to ask you, about the content of the commercial law course. The idea we might have today about commercial law is quite different from the content you have sketched out and developed there. Very different indeed. There's a bit of a mixture, of employment law, commercial law, business law, what have you.

Mireille Beaup: So he was trying to work out his own ideas, and gradually define them, so everyone now understands that this was the basis of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Jean-Paul Clément: Well, on this encyclical "Rerum Novarum", we will leave it there, and meet again for the last time next week for these broadcasts on Frédéric Ozanam. So until next time, dear listeners!