

*Frederic Ozanam:
Social Justice Vision
+ Personal Action*



200th

Frederic Ozanam's life was a dramatic fusion of intellectual achievement

Social Justice Vision



and direct, personal action

Social Justice Vision

Personal Action



to alleviate the poverty of the least amongst us.

Social Justice Vision

Personal Action



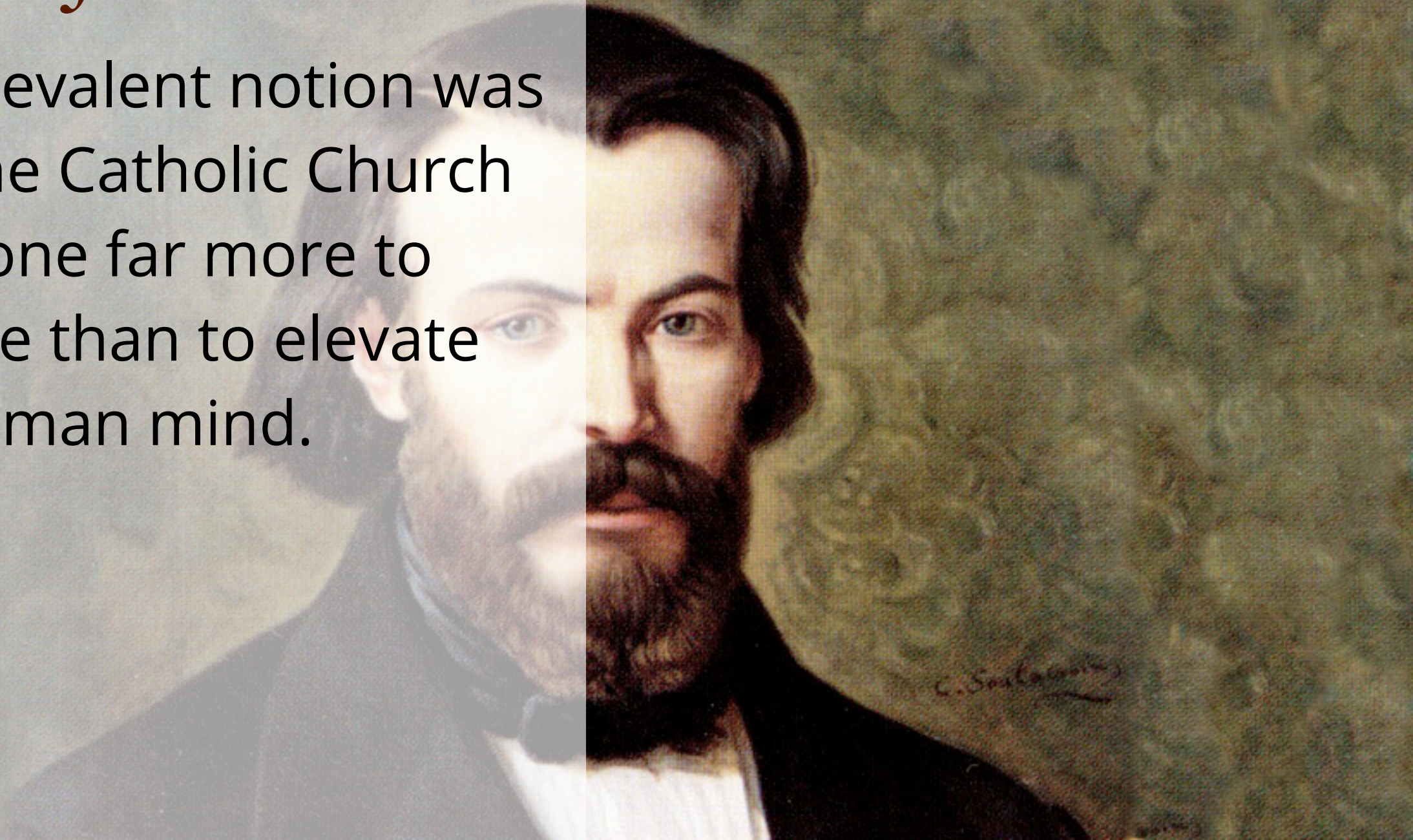
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Ozanam was an earnest advocate of **Catholic democracy**. He viewed that the Church should adapt itself to the changed political conditions resulting from the French Revolution.



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The prevalent notion was that the Catholic Church had done far more to enslave than to elevate the human mind.



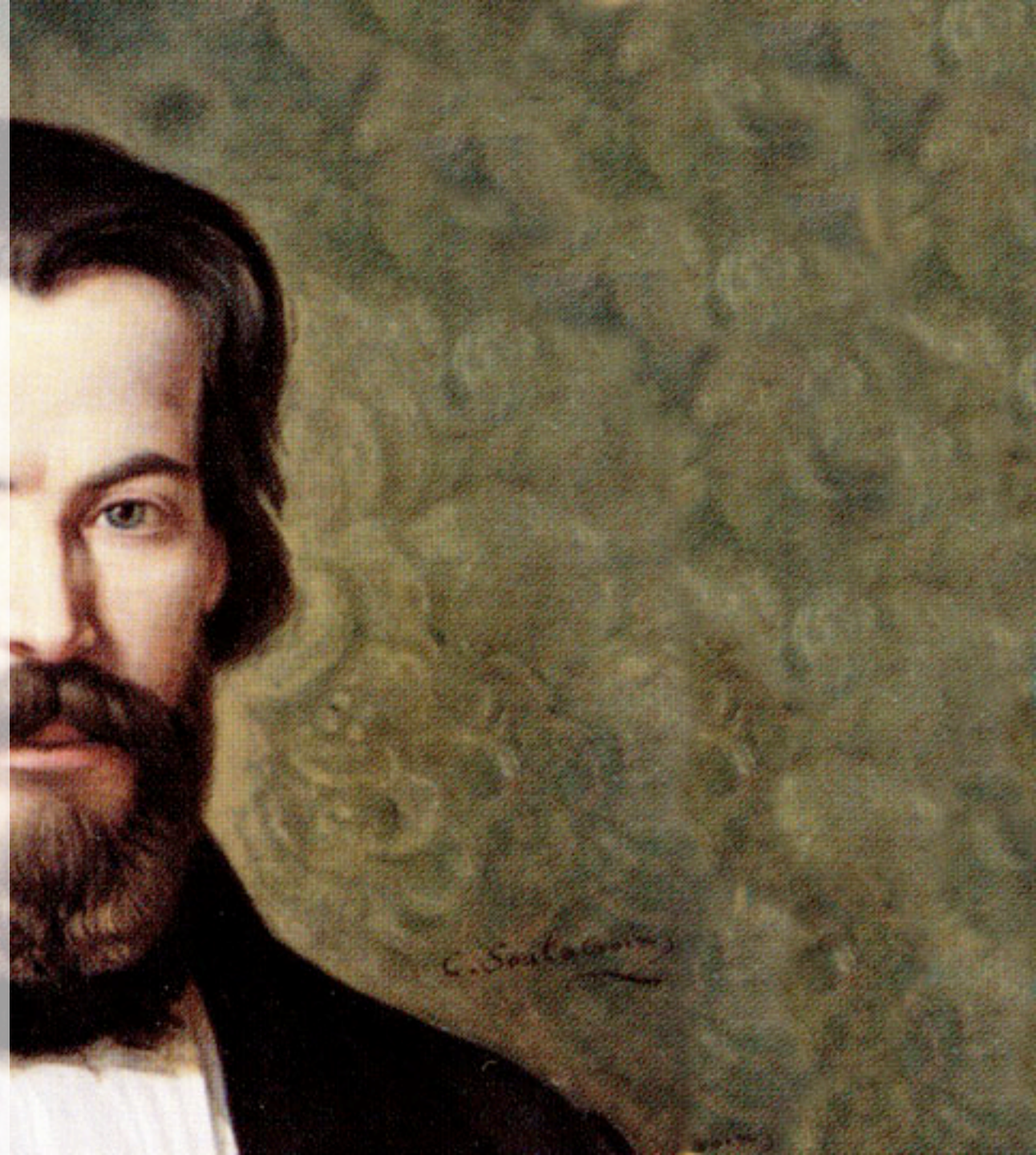
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In his years as a student at the University of Paris at the Sorbonne, professors were using their academic positions as a platform for their rationalist ideas against the Church.



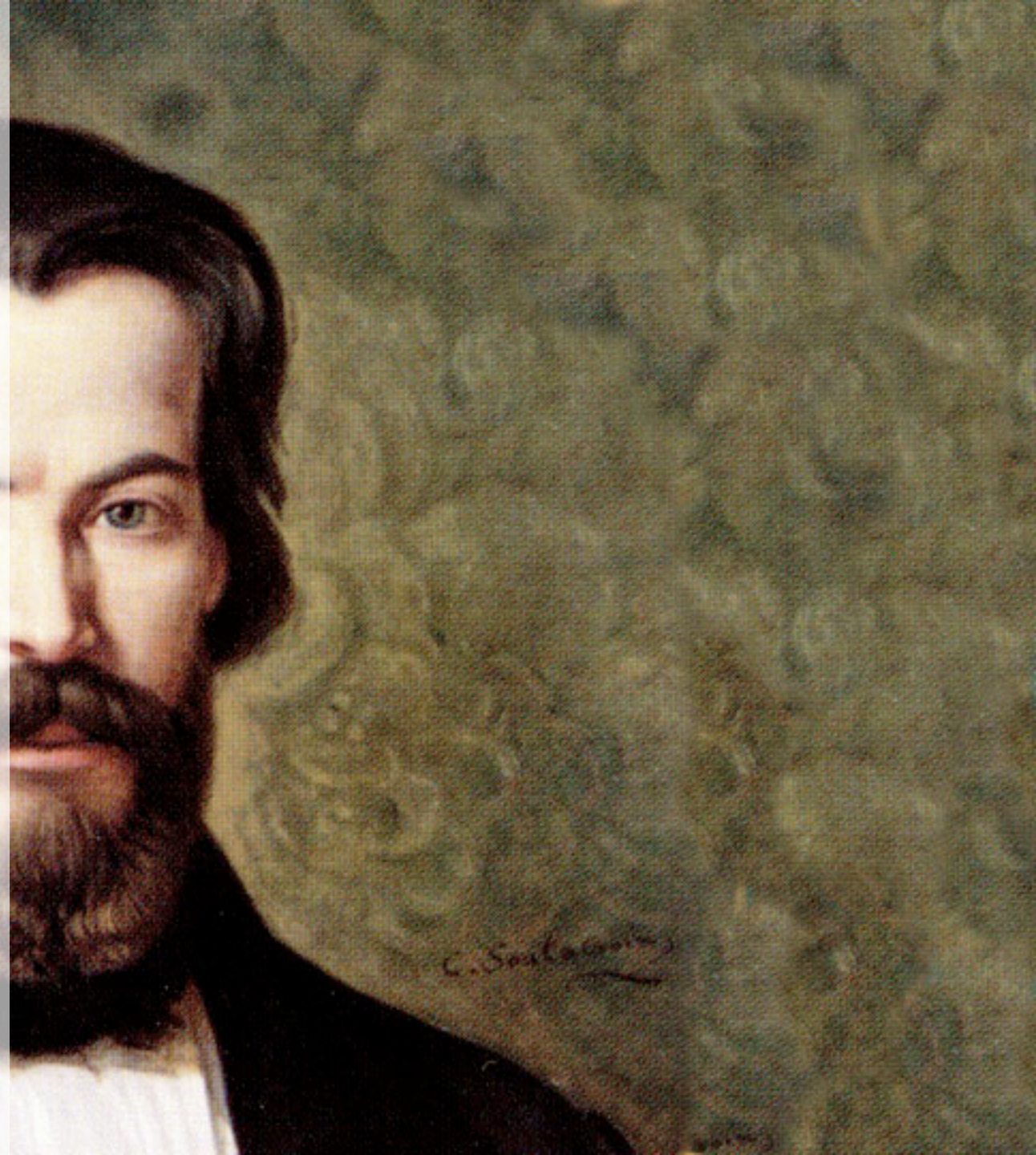
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Confronted by that situation, Frederic was impelled to a **battle for the truth**. His faith demanded a militant attitude. He knew how to valiantly defend the fundamental Truths of the Faith.



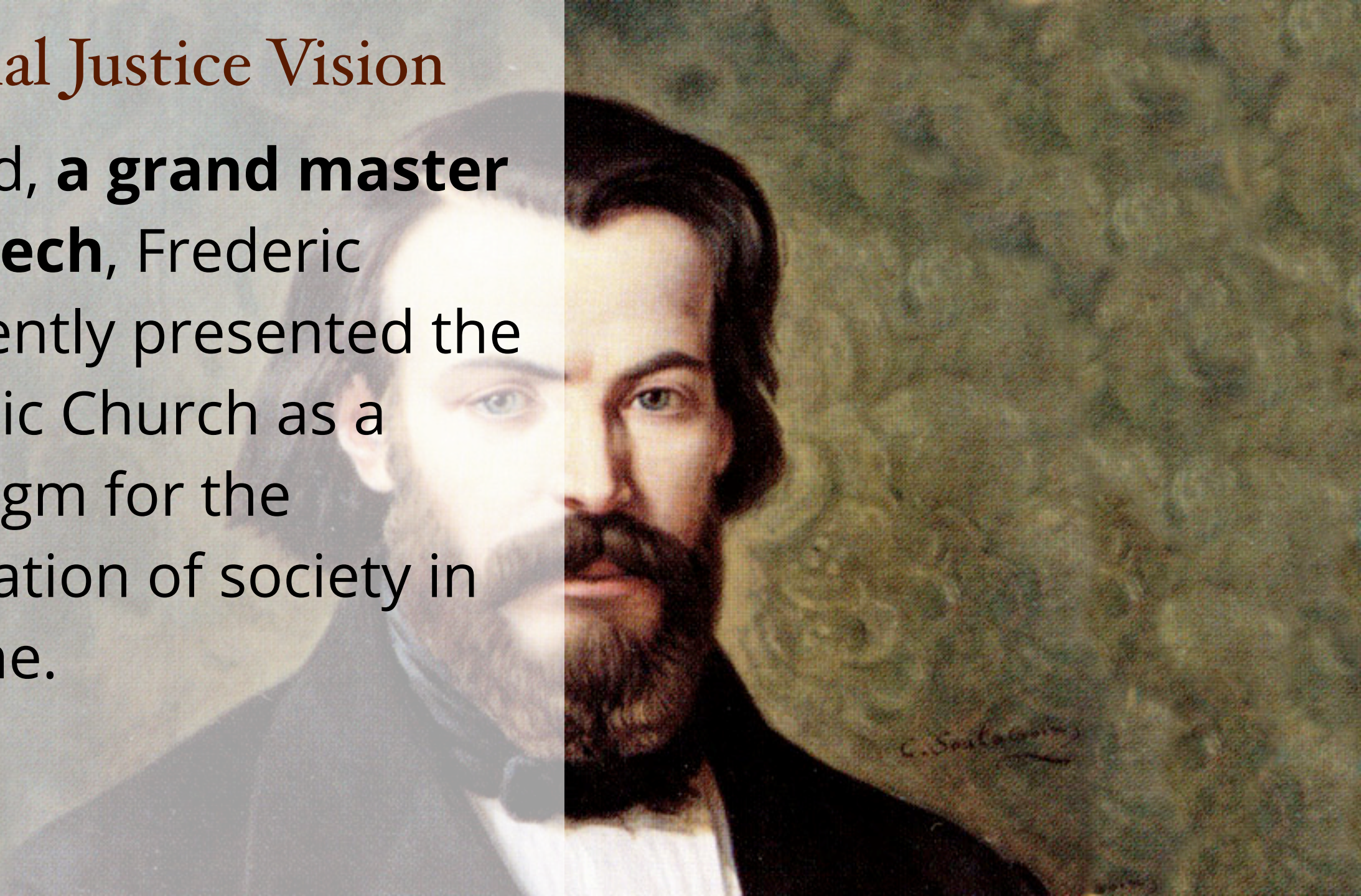
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First, **in his writings** he dwelt upon important contributions of historical Christianity, and the Catholic Church from the time of Christ through the Middle Ages.



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Second, **a grand master of speech**, Frederic eloquently presented the Catholic Church as a paradigm for the restoration of society in his time.



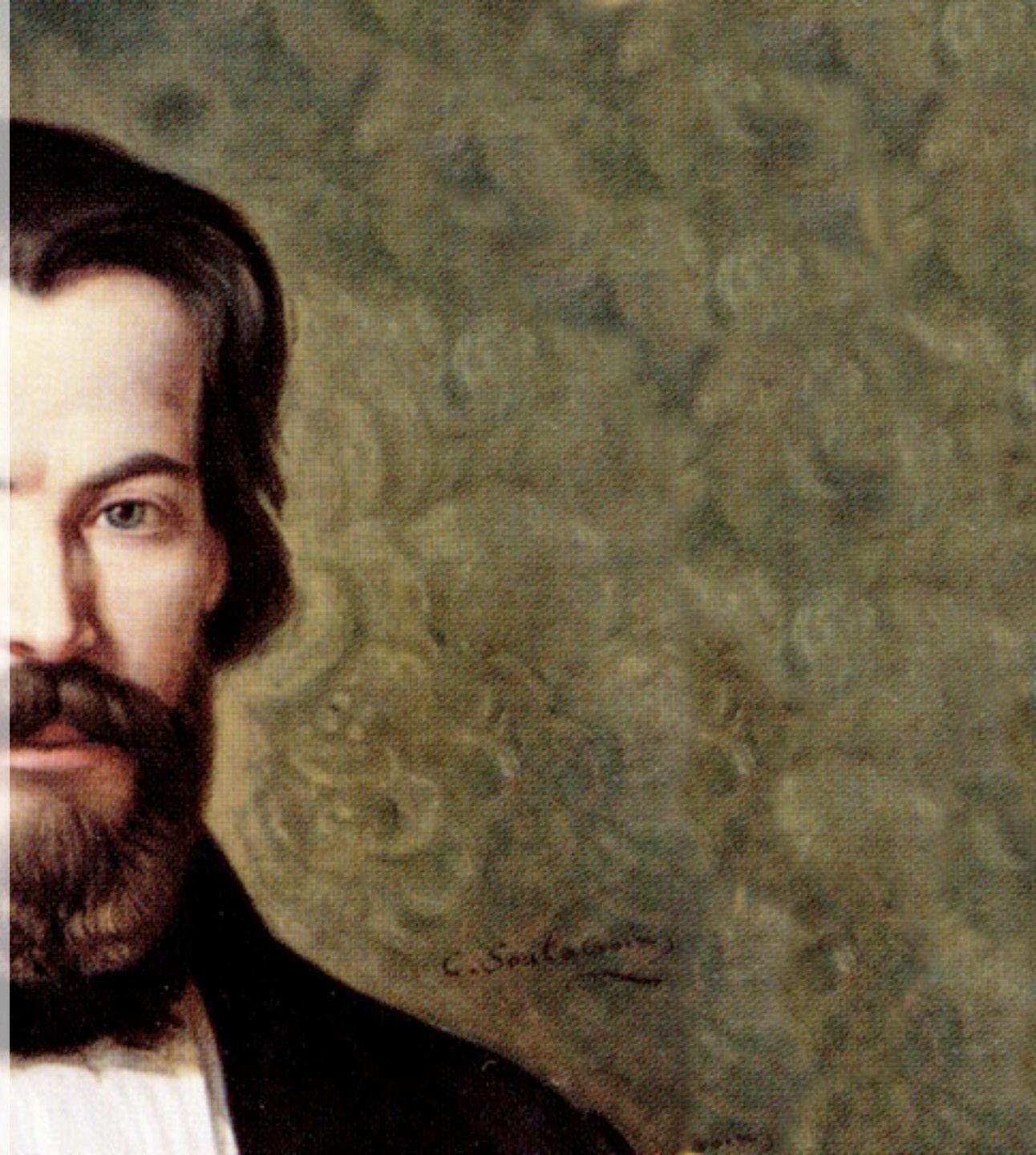
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He fearlessly championed **workers' rights**, including the right to join labor unions.



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While a law professor at Lyon, Ozanam developed his central thesis of the “salaire naturel”— the **natural wage**, a concept that became the precursor to the living wage movement.



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The working man, he believed, was by nature entitled, at a minimum, to a wage sufficient to provide for the necessities of life, the education of his children, and for the support of his old age.



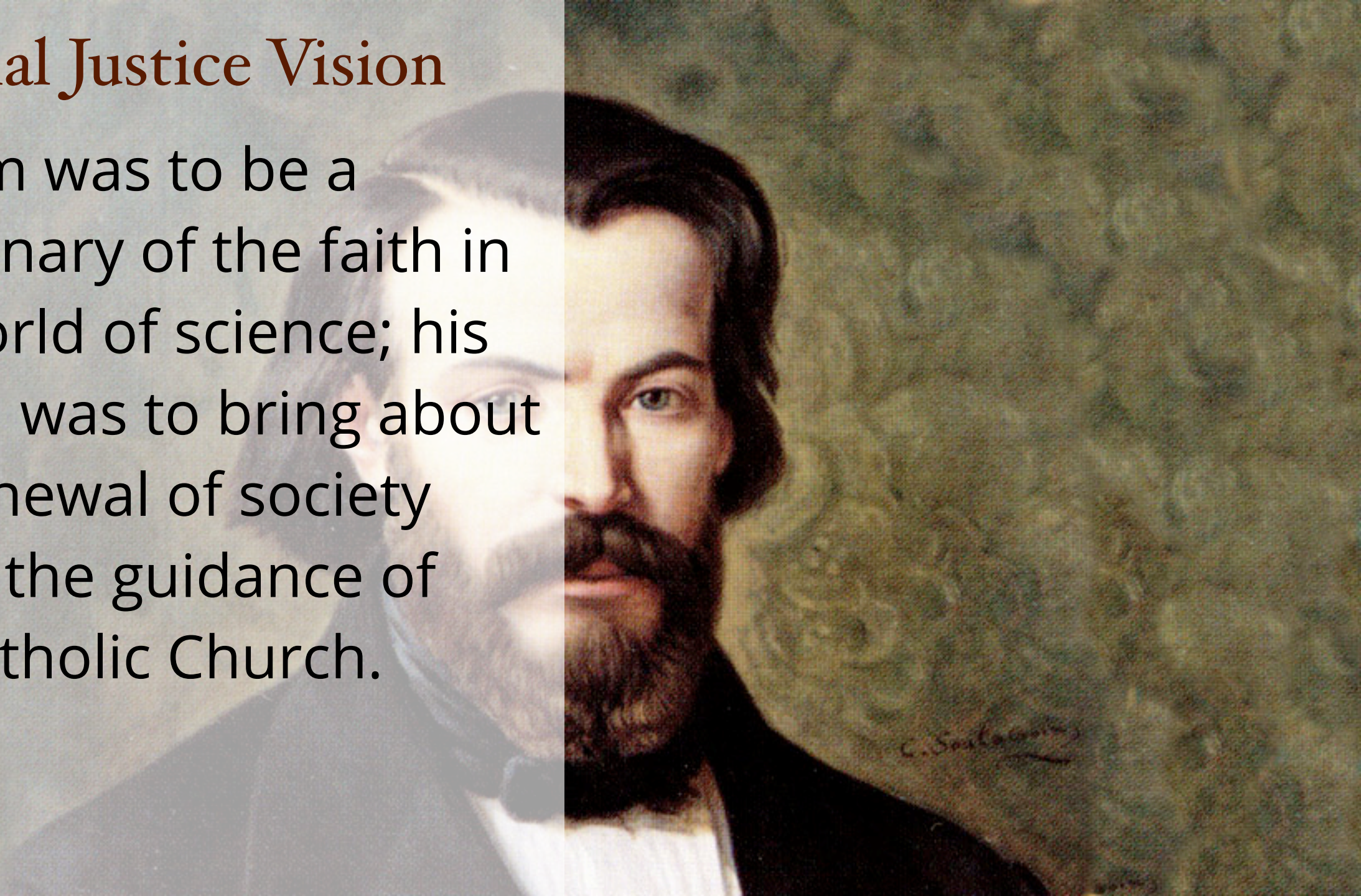
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Ozanam's writing laid the groundwork for Catholic social-justice teaching, helping set the stage for the great encyclicals on the rights of workers, starting with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (On Labor) in 1891.



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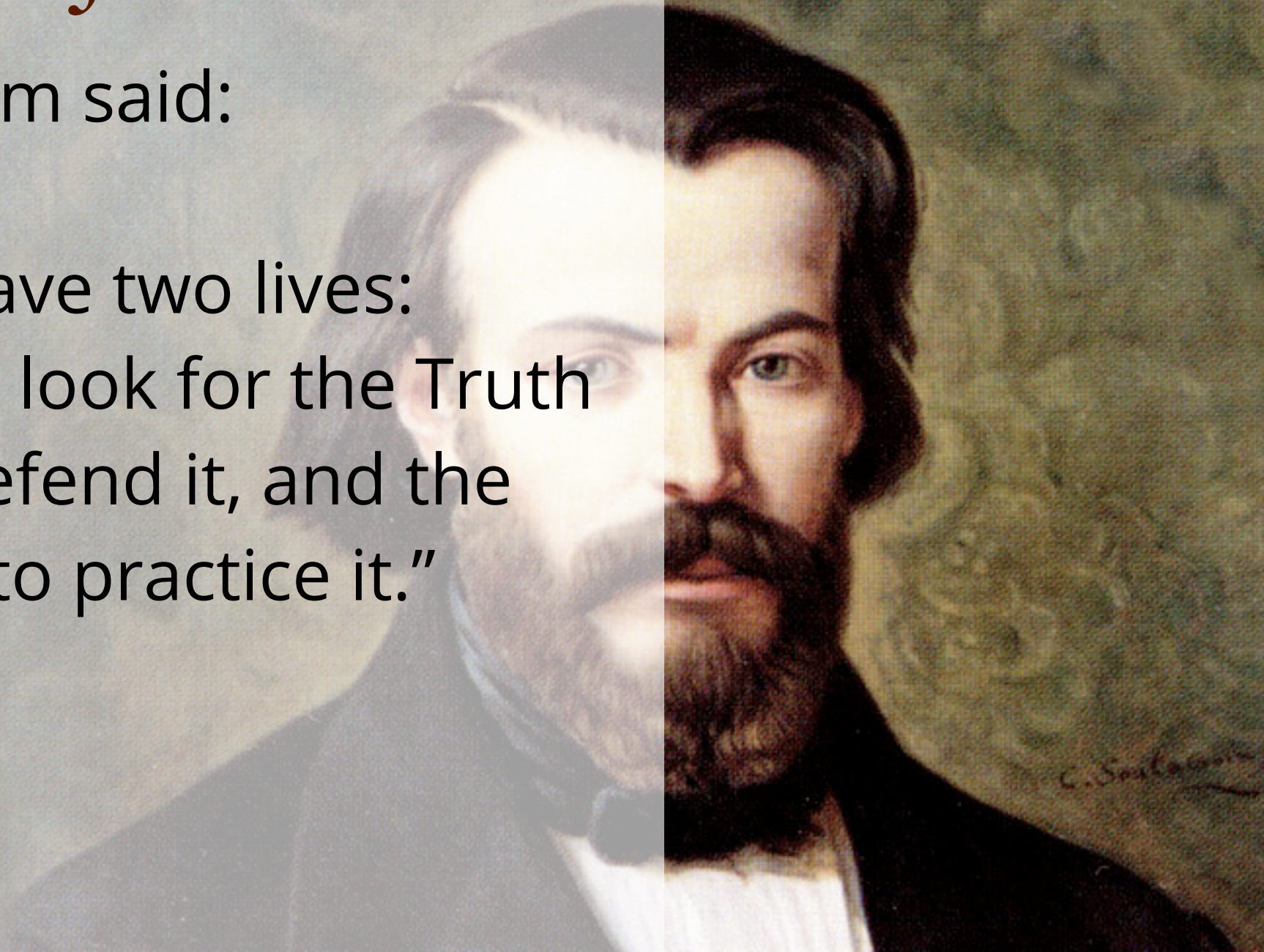
His aim was to be a missionary of the faith in the world of science; his dream was to bring about the renewal of society under the guidance of the Catholic Church.



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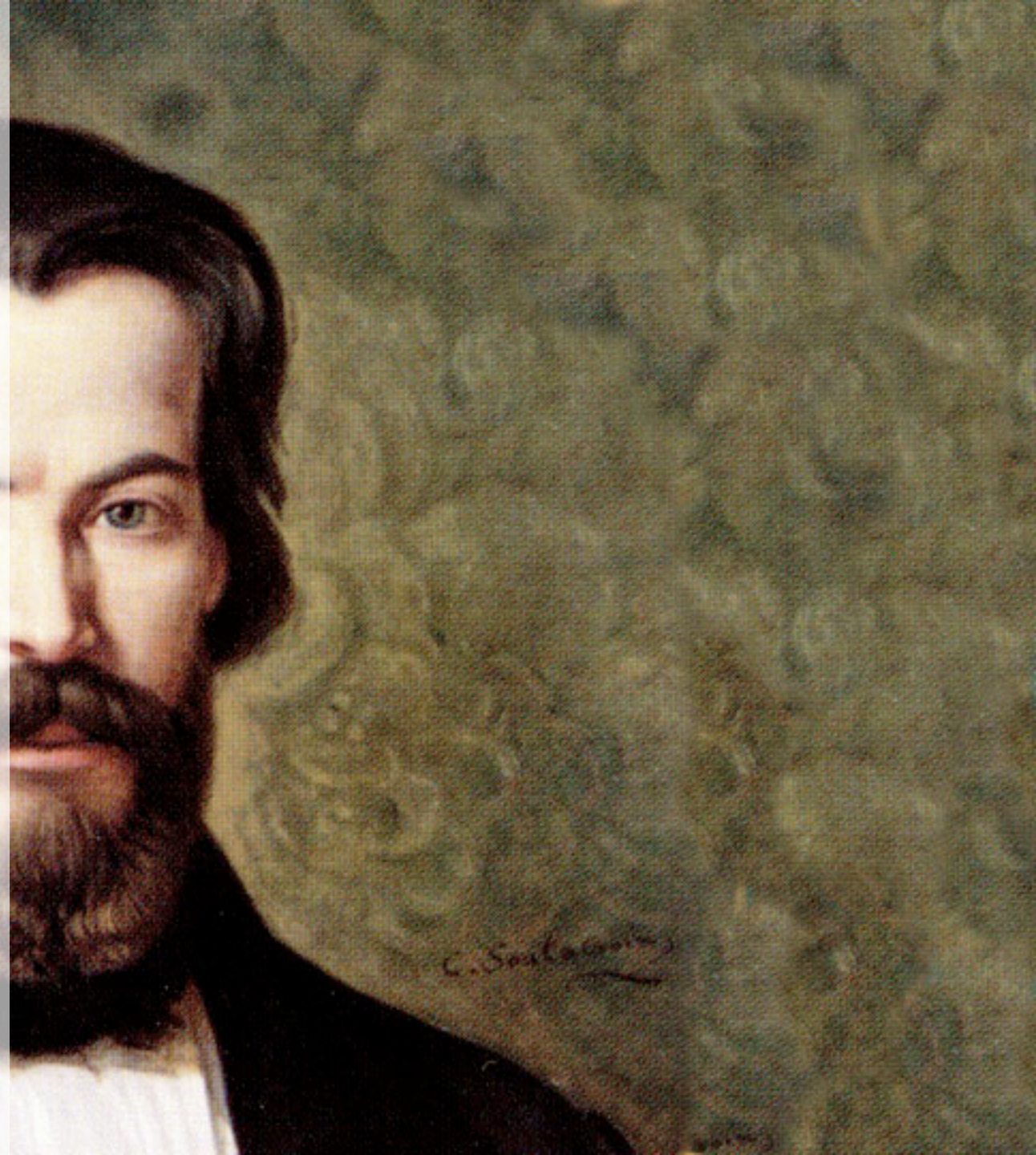
Ozanam said:

“We have two lives:
one to look for the Truth
and defend it, and the
other to practice it.”



Social Justice Vision

He well merits being proclaimed today (in this Year of Faith) “the patron of all apologists.” The combination of his intellectual clarity and his testimony to charity make him an axis for the new evangelization.



Reflect

What comments would you make on Ozanam's social justice vision? Have you changed any ideas you used to have on these subjects? What examples would you show others to help them understand the issues?



Intellectual Achievement



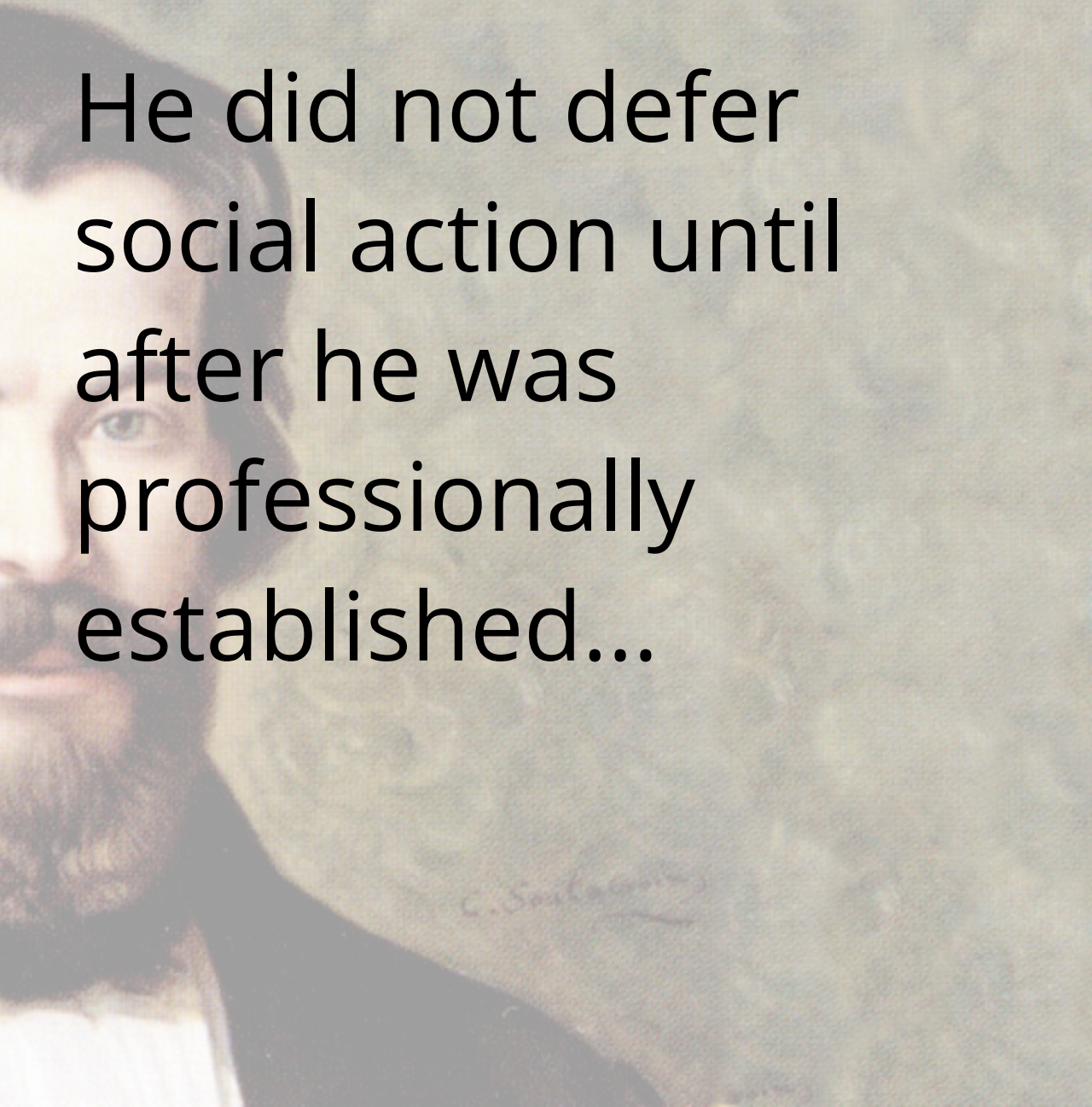
Personal Action

Ozanam was that rarest of intellectuals: one who served—directly, personally, throughout his entire adult life—the immediate needs of the poor.

Intellectual Achievement

Personal Action

He did not defer
social action until
after he was
professionally
established...





Personal Action

Rather, he saw the cold misery of the poor in Paris as a twenty-year-old student, and he carried wood and coal to them in their tenement slums.

Intellectual Achievement



Personal Action

As a twenty-year-old law student, in 1833, he founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society; it soon became the largest Catholic charity in the world.

Intellectual Achievement



Personal Action

He founded it not by drafting sophisticated corporate charters and negotiating favorable tax arrangements but, rather, by direct personal witness.

Intellectual Achievement



Personal Action

Committed to do more than talk about faith, Frederic and his small group met weekly to contribute to a secret collection and then visit the poor in their homes.

Intellectual Achievement



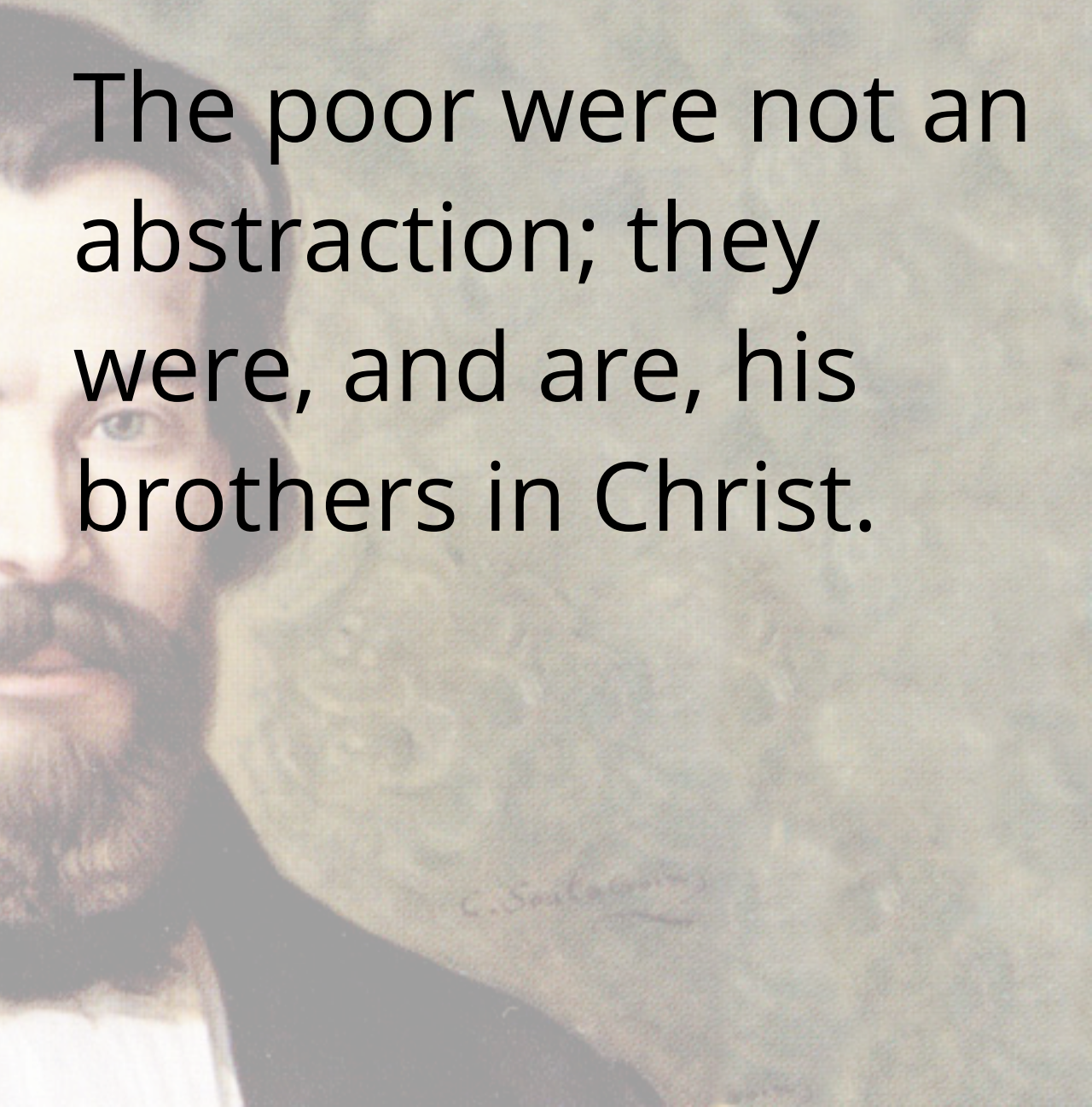
Personal Action

They developed their method of service under the guidance of Sister (now Blessed) Rosalie Rendu, D.C., who was prominent in her service in the slums of Paris.

Intellectual Achievement

Personal Action

The poor were not an abstraction; they were, and are, his brothers in Christ.



Intellectual Achievement



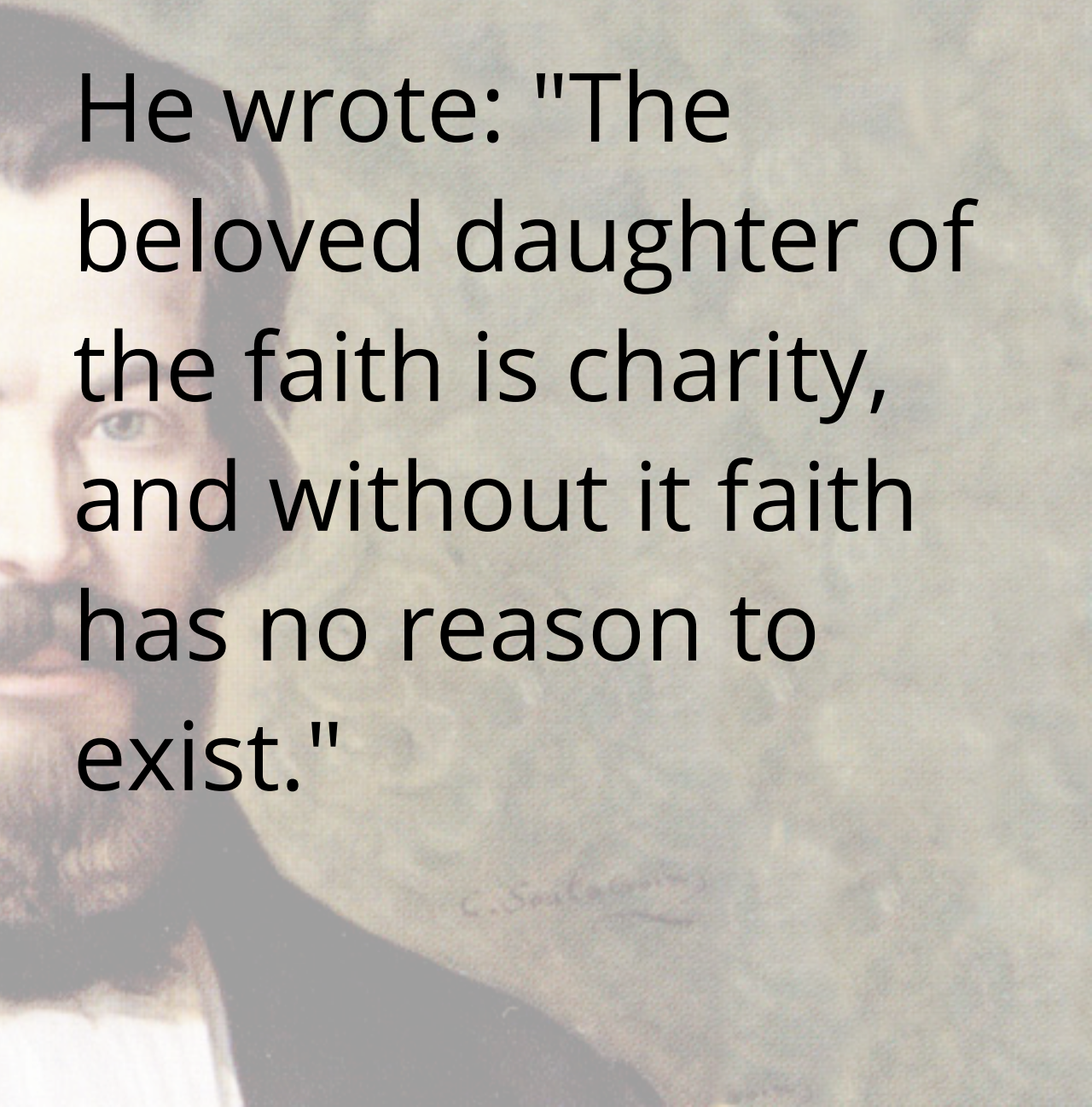
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Unlike many liberal French Catholics (to say nothing of conservative royalists), he did not fear and loathe the poor; he literally embraced them.

Intellectual Achievement

Personal Action

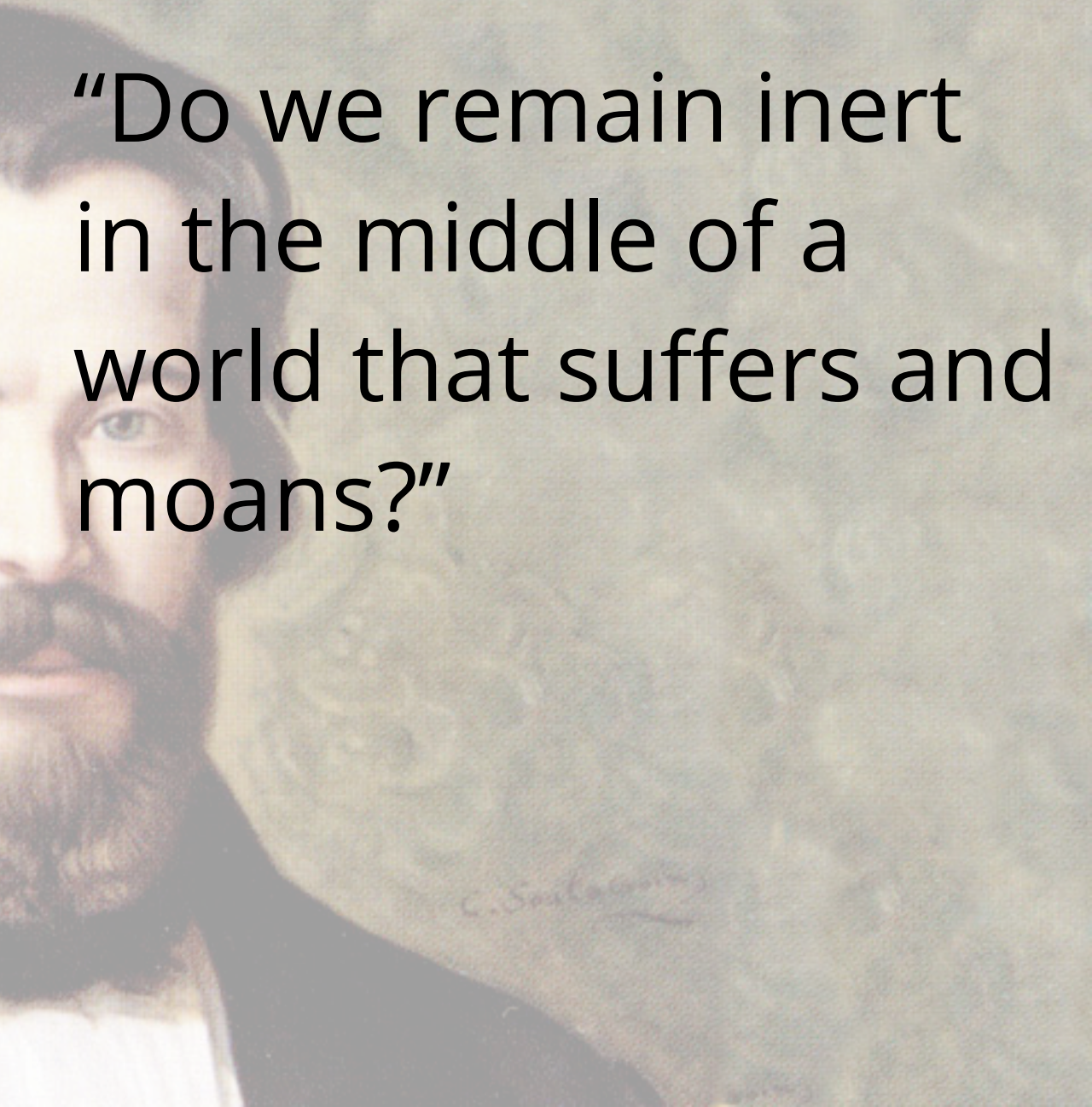
He wrote: "The beloved daughter of the faith is charity, and without it faith has no reason to exist."



Intellectual Achievement

Personal Action

“Do we remain inert
in the middle of a
world that suffers and
moans?”





Reflect

Which of my beliefs
do I live out well, and
which not so well?

Ozanam was always an activist in his soul. When he was just 18, in January 1831, he wrote:

I will be delighted if some friends gather around me! Then, if we join our efforts, we could create something together, and others would join us, and perhaps one day all society will join under this protective shade: Catholicism, full of youth and strength, will rise up suddenly upon the world.

At a time when the Catholic Church was on the defensive and under assault, especially in France, Ozanam was unfailingly optimistic, affirmative, and progressive.



Perhaps there was considerable utopianism and naiveté in much of Ozanam's worldview, in believing that private charity could significantly ameliorate deeply embedded structural poverty. Nevertheless, he firmly believed that the widespread practice of direct, personal, individual charity to individual poor was the best hope for avoiding social disaster.

Sources:

1. Verheyde, Christian (2013-04-02). *15 Days of Prayer with Blessed Frédéric Ozanam*. New City Press.
2. *Antoine Frederic Ozanam: Building the Good Society* by David L. Gregory
3. Wikipedia: Frederic Ozanam
4. *Frederic Ozanam, Grand Apologist of the Faith in the 19th Century* by Father Teodoro Barquín, C.M.