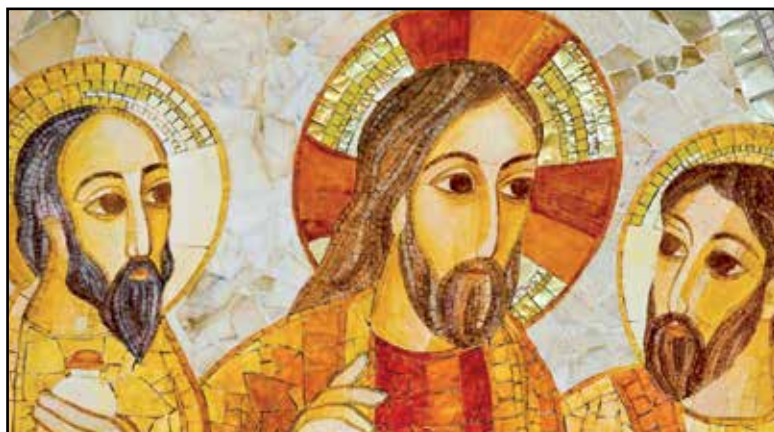


Finding again the life-giving source

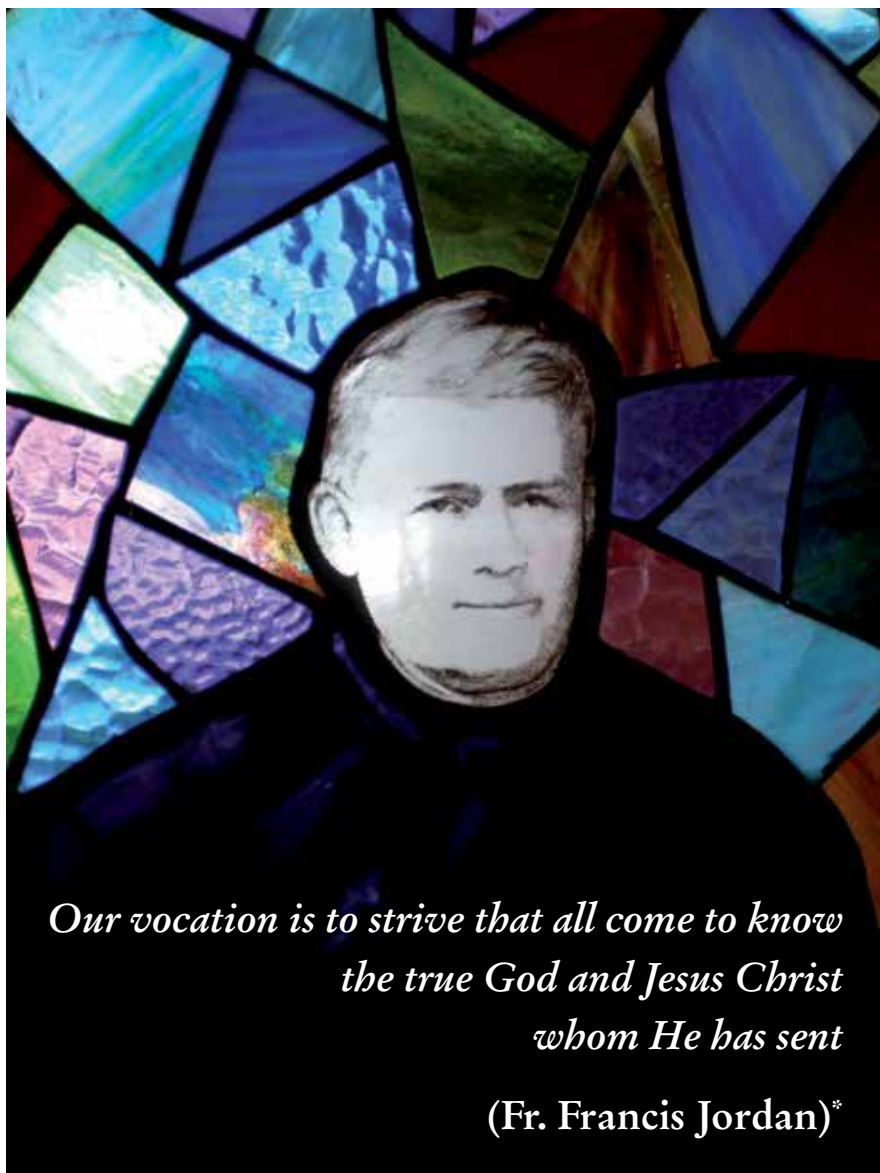
Living the Salvatorian charism with passion and authenticity

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SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE SAVIOR – SDS
Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians

08 December 2017



*Our vocation is to strive that all come to know
the true God and Jesus Christ
whom He has sent*
(Fr. Francis Jordan)*

* Cf. Fr. Francis Jordan, *Chapter Talks*, 11 March 1898.

Cover picture:
Missionnaires de la joie
Mosaic by Marko Ivan Rupnik.

Table of Contents

The need for a new step forward...	8
The heart of the Salvatorian charism	11
The principle of “Knowing”	13
The concern of the Founder	16
The identifying core of our charism	19
Conclusion: The source and the river	24



Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians

FINDING AGAIN THE LIFE-GIVING SOURCE

*Living the Salvatorian charism
with passion and authenticity*

1. Dear confreres, cordial greetings from our Motherhouse in Rome. I write this letter to you in the midst of our celebrations of the centenary of the death of our Founder, Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan. As you know, members of the Salvatorian Family throughout the world are involved in many ways in this unique event, longing to remember the essential aspects of the legacy our Founder has left us as an inheritance. For we



Salvatorians, this is an historical opportunity to come near once again to drink from the spring of the spiritual depth and apostolic passion of Fr. Francis Jordan. Obviously this means much more than mechanically reproducing his words or simply accentuating the attitudes of the Founder. The task we have before us is to return again to the foundational experience of the Spirit that moved the Founder to begin his apostolic work and, at the same time, to make as our own those essential elements that comprise the identity of the

Salvatorian charism. In other words, the main objective of this letter is to invite you to reflect – individually or communally – on how we can formulate in these times the essence of the charism of the foundational spiritual experience of Fr. Francis Jordan and how to maintain our fidelity to this source, whose waters never dry up (Is 58:11).

2. I suppose that all of us have asked ourselves at some time about what is the identity of our charism and how can it be expressed today. Often I have heard people ask: “*What is your charism?*” The responses are always varied: “*evangelize by all ways and means,*” “*form Christian leaders,*” “*work for the salvation of all,*” “*popularize the eternal truths,*” etc.... In reality, these various responses do not help us much in terms of trying to transmit an objective vision of the original core of the charism by the activities described. Often it turns out that in these responses we find an explanation of the means to realize our apostolic mission that derives from our charism, instead of being a proper definition of it. Although the Salvatorian charism can be lived out apostolically in various ways, there is a “core” that constitutes it. It has to do with a common thread that is the true source of unity for Salvatorians of the most varied cultures. Even if up to now we have not arrived at a consensus about what identifies the Salvatorian charism, it does not mean that it does not exist or that it cannot be identified. No Salvatorian should absent him or herself from this search of taking very seriously the spiritual and apostolic patrimony of Fr. Francis Jordan. I recognize that only in following along the path of clarifying the core of our charism, will we have the elements that will help us give new meaning to our works. Or perhaps it will help us update those apostolic choices that were made in the spirit of a certain era but that today are calling for new forms, new styles and possibilities of living the charism. The Society will only be significant if it revolves around the axis of the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan!

3. As the years go by, I am aware that one of the risks we have in the Society is that of losing a clear awareness of the identity of the charism that inspired its beginnings. When that awareness of the charism is lost, the structures become a dry skeleton, our Constitution a dead letter, and our apostolic activity is limited to projects based on individual success and achievement. Furthermore, I would like to point out that our Salvatorian identity reaches its best expression not in each one of us separately but rather in the amalgamation of those who live united with one another in fidelity to the Founder. In this context it is worth recalling a beautiful meditation of Fr. Francis Jordan on the importance of living united in his vision and spirit: “... *where this unity is missing you can be sure of failure. Each congregation has its own spirit, and as soon as you stray you go down the wrong track. An apple tree is not a pear tree; a Franciscan is not a Dominican; a Jesuit is not a Trappist. And it is the mind of the Church that after the death of the founder, she calls attention to the spirit of the founder.*”¹ From the onset, the Founder knew that his apostolic work would have a particular charism, its own identity, and consequently, a specific richness to contribute to the Church of his times. The particularity of his charism will always be our point of reference par excellence, since it is about the roots that unite us in our diverse personal and cultural identities. Moreover, for us the Salvatorian charism is a blessing that fills us with grace.

4. Over the length of our history, there have been many men and women Salvatorians, who have dedicated themselves to illuminating the key elements of our Salvatorian way of being and acting in the Church. Much material has been written and important documents have been translated on our Salvatorian charism and identity. In the last decades there have been various meetings, conferences, encounters, above all by means of the International Commissions of History and of Charism. There is

¹ Fr. Francis Jordan, *Chapter Talks*, 1899/01/13.

no doubt that we have much for which to be grateful to so many Salvatorian men and women who have helped us up to now, understand and deepen the original project of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan. But as I said above, there persists among us a situation of distinct interpretations of the Salvatorian charism that unfortunately does not permit us to construct a shared vision. Now more than ever we feel the need to make explicit what is at the core of the Salvatorian charism, as the driving force of our life and our actions.

The need for a new step forward...

5. From my experience on the Generalate, I believe the time has come to discover anew what is the essential trait of our Salvatorian identity as a valuable and needed gift in the Church, for the Church, and from the Church. Over the last few years a series of texts have appeared that affirm the components that



constitute the central core of the spiritual and apostolic project of Fr. Francis Jordan. What is left to do is to collect in a synthetic form all the positive things that have been accomplished in the study of the fundamental roots of the charism. But before proceeding, I wish to enumerate some reasons why we need to ascertain this core, which has to do with our identity, as a point of departure for the discernment of our Salvatorian apostolic options in the world of today.

- a. We can no longer allow ourselves to remain satisfied with the personal or regional interpretations of what it might mean, “to be a Salvatorian.” In the Society of the Divine Savior distinct formulations of our charism are known, many times in conflict with one another. On the other hand I observe a growing clamor in the Society coming from the younger generations, asking from us a better quality of life and questioning our lack of clarity in terms of what is most central to our life as Salvatorians, as well as its purpose. While visiting the Units of the Society I have been able to take note of the various explanations of our charism that sometimes become barriers that impede us from arriving at a clear identification of the spine of the apostolic project of our Founder.

- b. In particular, we ordained Salvatorians can no longer continue being recognized and valued “in the first place” for our apostolic faculties as presbyters, without expressing clearly – and with all of its power – what characterizes our consecrated life, along with presbyteral ministry. The identity of a Salvatorian – whether ordained or not – is given in the first place by his religious profession, with a consequent fidelity to the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan. Putting this latter element in second place makes the expression of our charism poorer, which identifies us as such and consequently our specific contribution to the mission of the Church, thereby impoverishing the Church itself.

- c. We can no longer continue to justify our apostolates, neither at the personal initiative nor at the communal level, with the current idea that any means is valid as a response to our charism. I want to remind us that “by all ways and means” is not synonymous to the Salvatorian charism. When we understand our charism through the prism of the universality of means, we simply are making of these “means,” “ends” in themselves. It is evident that the universality of ways and means is an important dimension of our identity in terms of

the operative expression of the Salvatorian charism. But it only makes sense if it corresponds to the purpose expressed by the charism.

- d. Furthermore, we cannot continue to promote vocations and form our candidates without presenting the core of our charism in such a way that functions as the identifying framework and source of unity for our life and mission. It is no longer enough to say that we are an “International Society” with a great diversity of apostolic activities without presenting an element that unifies and identifies us. Of course, this does not mean that everyone should do the same things, but rather by our words and actions we need to know how to identify what is the common thread that assures a dynamic unity among Salvatorians who act in very distinct apostolic realities and cultures.
6. In summary, it could appear that I am talking about an identity crisis, but in reality I believe that it is more about a credibility crisis. In fact, I see that there is very little clarity in terms of the specific role we fulfill as “Salvatorian religious of apostolic life.” In addition, I have seen in various places that our symbols, gestures, language, appear not to have an impact on the life of our newer generations. We cannot continue to be indifferent to this situation. Reality obliges us to return anew to the spirit of our Founder and at the same time we have to try to reach a common understanding of what is the specific contribution the Salvatorian charism offers to the mission of the Church. This is a task that of course we cannot delegate to anyone else. We have to roll up our sleeves and do it ourselves! And no one other than us can raise high the Salvatorian banner.

The heart of the Salvatorian charism

7. In order to point to the core of the identity of our life and mission, the first thing to consider is the long work of study on the history and charism of our Founder, which has taken place up to now. Following the direction of Vatican Council II, during



the last decades we Salvatorians have tried to “return to the sources,”² particularly through the work of the History and Charism Commissions. A privileged moment of this research was the revision of the text of the Constitution, which was officially approved on 08 December 1983. Afterwards, through the work of the International Renewal Commission, other important activities took place, such as for example, the development of the “Mission Statement” and the “Resolution on Our Life in Apostolic Community.”³ Later, with the guidance of a joint commission of the three Salvatorian branches, a document was developed called “The Charter of the Salvatorian Family,”⁴ as an expression of our common identity.

² Some time after Vatican Council II ended, in November 1971, Fr. Earl D. Skwor (Superior General of the Society), made a call to Salvatorians to redefine their mission (vision of Fr. Jordan) in the Church and world. (See SDS Informations, Rome, November 1971, n° 7).

³ See “Renewal Documents” approved by the XVI General Chapter, at Graz (Austria) of 1999.

⁴ See the document approved at the XVIII General Chapter, at Krakow (Poland) of 2012.

8. Undoubtedly, all of this work has offered us a timely reading of the key elements of our charism, of the spirituality and apostolic vision of our Founder. Nonetheless, perhaps not many Salvatorians know about (or remember) a recommendation that has been left behind. It has to do with the task of revising Chapter One of the Constitution since in 1981 it was not possible to describe correctly the charism and foundational ideas of Fr. Francis Jordan.⁵ In the current text of the Constitution, the chapter on “Our Vocation and Mission” is cobbled together. Or to say it more elegantly, it seems to be a mosaic that has not provided the needed clarifications that were to be made in due time. As a result, the revision of this chapter of the Constitution is a challenge that we should not put off facing with decisiveness and courage. I wish that a reflection on this letter will stimulate and orient the work being called for by the times, taking up once again, in a certain way, this work that remained behind given that we cannot relegate to the background this search for the true vision, mission and foundational decision of Fr. Francis Jordan.

9. In effect, these elements of our history help us understand the important efforts that were made to explore deeply the vocation and purpose of the Society. Thanks to this work, surely today, we know much more about the intentions, proposals and foundational intuition of the Founder. These elements are exactly what permit us to recognize the identity of the Society and of course, that need to be expressed clearly in our Constitution. As I have said before, perhaps the moment has arrived for the reworking of Chapter One of our Constitution so that we will have more clearly explained the evangelical and theological elements that ground the Salvatorian charism. It is not necessary to repeat here how important it is that we all

⁵ According to some historians when the Constitution was written in the 80s, in the Society there was insufficient historical study and a great disparity of attitudes prevailed regarding our identity and mission. (See Restrepo, David R., “Mosaico del Capítulo I”, 16 June 2014).

have a united perspective that is able to help us make evident and live the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan in its totality and without reductions. Also, let us not forget that all the texts we have are always subject to revision, with the goal of adding those components that are essential, combining the original spirit with the needs of the times today.

The principle of “Knowing”

10. Returning to the initial intention of this letter, which is to demonstrate the characteristic that identifies our charism, I would like to take as the starting point precisely the work of the International Joint Charism Commission. Among other things, the Commission has determined that our



charism is particularly rooted in four biblical texts.⁶ The Bible is the definitive place from where the Salvatorian charism arises.

⁶ These are the biblical texts: “*And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*” (Jn 17:3); “*Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time*” (Mt 28:19-20); “*And he said to them, ‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation’*” (Mk 16:15); and “*But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever*” (Dn 12:3). See the document: “Key Elements: Salvatorian Charism, Mission, Spirituality and Identity,” International Charism Commission, 2001. [Trans. Note: the Spanish language version of Dn 12:3 says “instruct” (instruyeron) whereas most English versions use “lead” as found in the “Key Elements” document].

The Word of God is the source of inspiration for the vision of the apostolic charism of our Founder. It was in it that he found the answers to the challenges that his reality presented to him and which worried him so much. Consequently we are obliged to start here as our point of departure because without this content we will not be able to understand the faith experiences nor the reasons for the foundation and the apostolates assumed by Fr. Francis Jordan. Without the original biblical vision of the Founder, we run the risk of talking about the Salvatorian charism solely in abstract terms or projecting onto it our particular points of view.

11. By means of a comparative and attentive reading of the key elements of the four biblical texts, we will notice there is a principle that is able to summarize the others, that is: “*that all may know You.*” It is not difficult to take note of this unifying core concept expressed in some form or other in the verbs used in the respective biblical citations: “...*that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ*” (Jn 17:3); “*Teaching all nations...*” (Mt 28:19); “*Proclaim the Gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15) and “*those who instruct the many in justice...*” (Dn 12:3). Based on these key elements our Founder began his untiring activity. His main concern was that all would know in Jesus Christ the love of God and thereby be saved, not by means of cognitive information but rather in a holistic, personal, and transformative way.
12. Following this line of thought we can understand perfectly well the reasons why Fr. Francis Jordan founded his apostolic work with the name of “Apostolic Teaching Society.”⁷ This “Society” was constituted by two elements that indicated, together and in an intrinsic way, its character and purpose:

⁷ In 1893, the Founder changed once again the name of the Society, thereby being called definitively the “Society of the Divine Savior.” Nonetheless, the change of name did not imply a change of purpose, which continued to be the same.

to be apostolic and instructional. These elements are basic in order to comprehend well the apostolic charism of the project of the Founder: to prepare the greatest number possible of persons (men and women), so that imbued by his spirit, they would be able to go out to the entire world with the clear purpose of “...to promote and spread, through religious instruction, the Holy Catholic faith;”⁸ “...to help the Church of God in the spreading, in the defense and in the animation of the faith in word and deed;”⁹ “...defend, foster, and extend the Kingdom of God through religious instruction;”¹⁰ “...religious instruction, in order to assist holy Church, in the spreading, defending and reviving of the Catholic Faith;”¹¹ “...to propagate, confirm, and defend the Roman Catholic faith among all peoples of the earth.”¹² These texts affirm the reading we have been doing about a possible common thread that synthesizes the thought of the Founder. That is to say it is the spine of the principle already indicated above, that of *knowing/teaching*. It is not about any type of teaching! Rather it is about the teaching that leads one to an existential knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made human among other humans.¹³ In sum, we can say that what Fr. Francis Jordan wanted most was nothing more than to help the Church, with words and works, so that all people, by means of Jesus Christ and in virtue of the action of the Spirit, would come to knowledge of the one true God and in that way find salvation.

⁸ Statutes of 1880 (trans. from text as cited by A. Boesing, “El carisma salvatoriano,” *¡Seguimos necesitando al salvador!*, ed. L. Munilla, Logroño, 1981, p. 32: erroneously cited as “Rule of 1880”).

⁹ Statutes of 1881 and Statutes for the Collaborators of 1883.

¹⁰ Rule of 1884.

¹¹ Statutes for the Collaborators of 1883.

¹² See in Statutes of 1878; Rule of 1882 and Statutes of the Academy 1890.

¹³ It is always important to remember: it is not about theoretical knowledge, as proposed by the Gnostic heresy that existed at the time of the redaction of the Gospel of John, but of an experience of a transformative encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Naturally we will not pause here to consider this topic but I want to stress the importance of deepening this.

The concern of the Founder

13. Nonetheless, in terms of this topic we need to take into account another very important aspect, that is, the faith experience of the Founder in the historical and ecclesial context in which he lived. We know that Fr. Francis Jordan attempted to interpret with great caution and depth the dangers of his era, totally subjected to the *Kulturkampf*, a movement of the



19th Century marked by anticlericalism. The Founder did not stand by as an idle spectator of what was taking place in those times, rather he made great efforts to understand how and why Catholics were abandoning so easily their faith and Church in the face of the new historical situation. In this context, we can perceive his profound search for the will of God for his life, reflected in this brief supplication: “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, ach, see how Your precious holy Bride [the church] is calumniated, persecuted and struck down.*”¹⁴ Those difficult times for the Church in Germany were what awakened little by little in him the burning desire to find a concrete response to the situation, with the aim of helping people have a vivid experience of faith. What he wanted most was to be leaven to help the life of faith grow, expressed in new ways of collaboration, of participation marked by a profound sense of belonging to the Church.

¹⁴ Fr. Francis Jordan, *Spiritual Diary*, I/12.

14. At the same time, it is important to recall that in general terms the theology of mission that predominated in the era of the Founder, was based on the importance of teaching and defending the content of the Faith that the Church was to guard and transmit with maximum fidelity.¹⁵ In accord with such a theological vision, this deposit, the “*Depositum Fidei*”, contained all the indispensable truths needed for our salvation. Consequently in the past, the principal focus of the apostolate of the Church was to conserve, explain, teach and defend the deposit of faith to all peoples. Because once this content was taught faithfully and accepted, it would produce fruit and sanctity of life in abundance. So, in this theological context it is understandable the great value placed on catechesis, with the challenge of making the truths of the Faith accessible and of teaching them in a simple and correct way, maintaining fidelity to the Gospel and the Tradition of the Church.
15. Furthermore, the features proper to this era help us understand Fr. Francis Jordan’s concern for evangelization, as he became aware that many did not know God and so were lost. This was the major concern of the Founder that is repeated many times as seen in his spiritual notes: “*I often think that most people who are going to be lost will be lost due to a lack of instruction.*” “*Instruction – instruct, do it, what you have in mind, if it is God’s will ...*” “*Work hard to know the truth and set yourself to it. Consider the words, ‘To enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.’*”¹⁶ Upon reading these words of the Founder between the lines, it is not difficult to identify a burning apostolic zeal that from the onset has been seen as a characteristic trait of his personality. On the other hand, the love

¹⁵ This perspective is only pointed to here but it is of capital importance the deep study of the theology and missiology of this era, as well as the relationship of this with the challenges presented by the world of Protestantism and others, in order to achieve a holistic view of the apostolic vision of Fr. Francis Jordan in his times.

¹⁶ Fr. Francis Jordan, *Spiritual Diary*, I/78, I/79 and I/82.

that consumes him in wanting to “*Instruct and save everyone*” is manifested in some verbs that are repeated continuously: propagate, announce, make accessible, insist, make a case for, write, teach. That is, he wants instruction to be done by all ways and means. For Fr. Francis Jordan the purpose of the Society should not exclude any means, any people or nation, in order to make known the love of the true God manifested in a unique and definitive way through the gestures of love of Jesus Christ, because in this consists our true life and salvation.

16. As we have seen here, the apostolate of religious instruction is a key aspect of the foundation of Fr. Francis Jordan. The encapsulating concept of “*instruct and save everyone*” summarizes what was truly in his apostolic heart. From the onset, this has been the principal purpose of the efforts of the Founder: to make known the life and teachings of Christ and His Church, so that all will know the true God. This has been the common denominator of Salvatorian identity and mission, about which Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer says the following: “...*the Society’s mandate is (...) to instruct in spoken and written word in order to make known to all men and everywhere God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, so that they know him more fully.*”¹⁷ Therefore, our desire today as in the days of our predecessors, can be nothing more than accomplishing this mission of evangelization, using all the means that we have available in order to make known God as a Loving Father, who has sent us Jesus Christ as the Savior of all humanity.

¹⁷ Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, Exchange of Ideas, ANNALES 1919, vol. III, n° III p. 211. Some words underlined by me. (Trans. from text as cited by A. Boesing, “El carisma salvatoriano,” *¡Seguimos necesitando al salvador!*, ed. L. Munilla, Logroño, 1981, pp. 33-34).

The identifying core of our charism

17. In summary, the more we study the original inspiration of our Founder the more we will become aware that the identifying core of the Salvatorian charism is condensed in the dimension of knowing/teaching the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, source of our salvation. In order to understand better this aspect of our charism, we ought to say that in Jesus Christ we come to see and know the One True God, like the Gospel of John affirms: “*I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them*” (17:26). In addition, as we meditate on this Gospel verse, we can understand that when He says: “*follow me*”, Jesus presents himself to His apostles as the way and guide for them to know His compassionate and merciful Father, who is the true God. And, at the same time, when He says: “*go*”, Jesus points to a mission of being collaborators in the transmission to others of the knowledge of the One and True God, on the basis of their own experience of Him. It is important to have present the logic of following because in it we find the inspiration of our Founder when he points out to us the dynamic of our vocation and mission. That is, following the “*example of the first apostles*” who went forth from Christ, we Salvatorians are also called to communicate to all peoples our own experience of the encounter with the Savior. In this way we can say that the Salvatorian vocation is nothing more than our humble response to the immense love of God that obliges us to make known Jesus and to have his message of Salvation taken to all who are hungering for the compassionate love of the One and True God.

18. Finally, as a way to conclude all that has been said up to now: how do we name the common thread that orients our Salvatorian way of being and acting today? Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer helps us respond to this question in a clear and direct way: “*the phrase ‘that they may know you’ and ‘him whom you have sent’ was*



*the starting point of the Society. And since this knowledge of God proceeds above all from the Son and is rooted in Him, to announce Christ, the Savior, has been the main task of the Society since its beginning.*¹⁸

I suppose a response better explained is not necessary. Consequently, in fidelity to our Salvatorian tradition, to speak about the identifying core of the Salvatorian charism in these days can be nothing more than *to make known Jesus, the Divine Savior of all peoples*, aware that in this expression we encounter Him who reveals to us the One God in whom we have salvation.

19. Clearly, our evangelizing commitment can be none other than *making known Jesus, the Divine Savior of everyone*. This is the central core and basic principle of the Salvatorian message, since in Him we encounter the one and true God. That is, we experience the loving salvation of God who is Love and only offers Love to all. The person of the Divine Savior shows us how to live from a more profound dimension of life because He is the Lord of our history, the key to our existence, because *“only He has words of eternal life”* (see Jn 6:68). This is our program. We cannot seek anything else but that Jesus Christ be made known, loved, and followed by everyone. As seen above,

¹⁸ See Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, Exchange of Ideas, ANNALES 1936, vol. IV, n° IV p. 180. The final phrase of the citation has been underlined by me. [Trans. found in *Contributions on Salvatorian History, Charism, and Spirituality*, vol. Seven (2009), excerpt pp. 5-6.]

in the Founder's original experience, *knowing and making known Jesus Christ*, was at the center and was the banner of our Society.¹⁹ Therefore what gives meaning to our Salvatorian life is the impulse to take to everyone this Good News of the love of God that, in Christ and by the action of the Spirit, saves. The Good News is the person of Jesus Christ, the most precious gift that we can offer to others. In the final document of the Assembly of Latin American Bishops gathered at Aparecida, in Brazil, there is a phrase that fully contains the sense of this central dimension of our Salvatorian vocation: "*Knowing Jesus Christ by faith is our joy; following him is a grace, and passing on this treasure to others is a task entrusted to us by the Lord, in calling and choosing us.*"²⁰

20. Having made explicit the core of our charism, we have in hand a fundamental criterion that is clear and valuable for apostolic discernment. This means that by participating in the evangelizing mission of the Church, we do not do everything that occurs to us, rather we have to choose the best means in each circumstance and place in order to *make known Jesus, the Divine Savior*. In accord with the reality of each time and place we will use this criterion in order to begin or to say if a specific pastoral activity sustains or not our Salvatorian identity. Through the prism of *making known Jesus, the Divine Savior*, we are invited to continuously evaluate our apostolates in order to see if they continue to help people know, love, and follow Jesus Christ, the face of the Mercy of God, and to remain in His Spirit. When we are not clear about this core of our charism we run the risk that our pastoral practice will be to continue doing the same thing as always and without the soul and fire with which we

¹⁹ El "*nuestro sello porta la imagen del Salvador docente, su palabra ¡'enseñad'! está en nuestra bandera*". See Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, Exchange of Ideas, ANNALES 1919, vol. 3, n° III p. 223.

²⁰ Concluding Document of the V General Conference of the Latin America and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, which took place at Aparecida (Brazil), May 2007, n° 18.

have been founded and sent by Fr. Francis Jordan. This is the reason why I believe this is the tool we need today, both as we initiate new apostolates as well as when we need to give new life to our apostolic activities. For as Pope Francis has exhorted us: “*I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.*”²¹

21. Identifying clearly the core of the Salvatorian charism stimulates us to an immense area of investigation beyond what has been done in this area. At the level of the study of our charism there is still much work to do from the biblical, theological, spiritual, and apostolic points of view as we have already pointed out. How important it is that we have history and charism teams with prepared persons who take on this particular task to help us deepen our Salvatorian charism of *making known Jesus, the Divine Savior* in all these dimensions in order to help us incarnate better the charism in these times! It is my dream that Salvatorian students in the various Units feel motivated to conduct their theological and pastoral investigations from this perspective, putting new light on the topic and helping us to live the particularity of the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan in the mission of the Church. I say this to you because I am convinced that, due to our cultural diversity, only by being conscious of the existence of the core of the Salvatorian charism, that unites us and identifies us as such, will we be able to dream and construct together new roads for the Society.
22. There is yet another aspect regarding the identity of our charism that deserves mentioning, because it helps us understand better our place in the universal mission of the Church. Since each charism makes its own contribution to the mission field and in its way of living the Gospel, there is no doubt that the

²¹ Pope Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*” (2013), n° 33.

Salvatorian charism offers a global perspective of the Christian mission and life. In the first place, it must be known that the Founder never accepted the idea of limiting the purpose of the Society to one or more specific activities because according to him, apostolic activities are not what give us our identity. Rather the activities are tools that help us realize the spiritual core of the charism. In this way, the Society of the Divine Savior, together with the other branches of the Salvatorian Family, contributes to the Church, from the core of its own charism, making known Jesus, the Son of God, as the Savior of the world, using an ample diversity of means. We Salvatorians, men and women, lay and religious, situated in different cultural contexts, feel impelled to proclaim without rest the good news of the Gospel in those places where Jesus Christ is yet unknown, opting for the means that prove they are the most useful to accomplish our apostolic mission in the specific space where that action takes place. Clearly we are not the only ones doing this and we have to be aware of the importance of working together with other groups, to share available resources and to collaborate on projects of evangelization that go beyond our narrow limits. In the same way we are also aware that we are not the exclusive owners of our foundational charism since all charisms are for the Church and belong to the Church. The Salvatorian charism itself has its roots in collaboration, the joining of forces, the spirit of family, elements that make our identity and apostolate authentic, credible and complete.

23. I would like to mention one last aspect. Identifying the core of our charism invigorates our participation in the international sphere of the Society itself, overcoming individualism and the selfish or nationalistic visions of each Unit when it thinks solely about itself. Here comes once again the call to construct a vision of common actions and collaboration by means of a network from the Salvatorian perspective. Today more than ever there is a need to promote a culture that is more Salvatorian, of units that collaborate with other units, of schools with others, of parishes

with others, etc. It is clear that this Salvatorian sharing is not as easy as it might first seem. Nonetheless, it is an essential activity that the world in which we live today is asking of us. I have no doubt that the vision of making known the Divine Savior, by means of international networks of collaboration that bring together human and financial resources at our disposal, is an authentic sign of our faithfulness to the mandate of our Founder to learn how to join forces among us all. Because definitely, there is strength in numbers!

Conclusion: The source and the river

24. I want to conclude this letter with the image of the source and the river. Let us imagine that our charism is the source from which we drink the water that fills us with life and gives quality



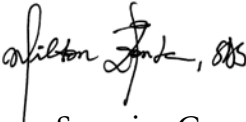
to our following Jesus Christ. But when the spring dries up the river loses its strength, it evaporates and disappears. The same could happen to our apostolic mission that runs the risk of evaporating, if it does not replenish itself with the font of its origin, that is, the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan. Also, just like a river that traverses and adapts to many and various landscapes, we too accomplish our mission in different countries and in distinct periods of time, always more enriched by the contribution of people of distinct cultures and of all

eras. Just like a river expands and grows in depth and width, our charism always allows for continuity and enrichment, as long as we do it in harmony with the original inspiration of Fr. Francis Jordan. Like a river that has a source that is its origin and gives it its identity, the spiritual experience of Fr. Francis Jordan is the spirit that characterizes us, integrates us, and gives us coherence so that we can offer our specific contribution to the mission of the Church at different times and in different places. Definitely, making known Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior to all peoples, is the common thread of our charism that gives identity, vitality and fruitfulness to the Salvatorian apostolate.²²

25. Finally, as Christmas approaches, I invite you to celebrate the “principal feast” of our Society by manifesting an immense interior joy that Christ is our Savior and that in Him we have known in a definitive and unique way the loving God who is near to us. In this feast we are not the protagonists but rather a child is, laid in a manger, who came to walk among and with us in order to be our Savior. We cannot remain indifferent before such a great mystery of a God who draws us with his tenderness and with the fragility of a child. Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, let us come to Him with the confidence that we are loved by God and at the same time, that we have the *apostolic mission of making known Jesus Christ* to those who await and are seeking Him, despite the adversities of life. Once again I invite you to pause a moment in silence before the manger, consoled by the nearness and tenderness of the one true God who came to save all. In this particular moment of contemplation, let us allow ourselves to be touched by the great love of God who loves each one of us and let us pray for one

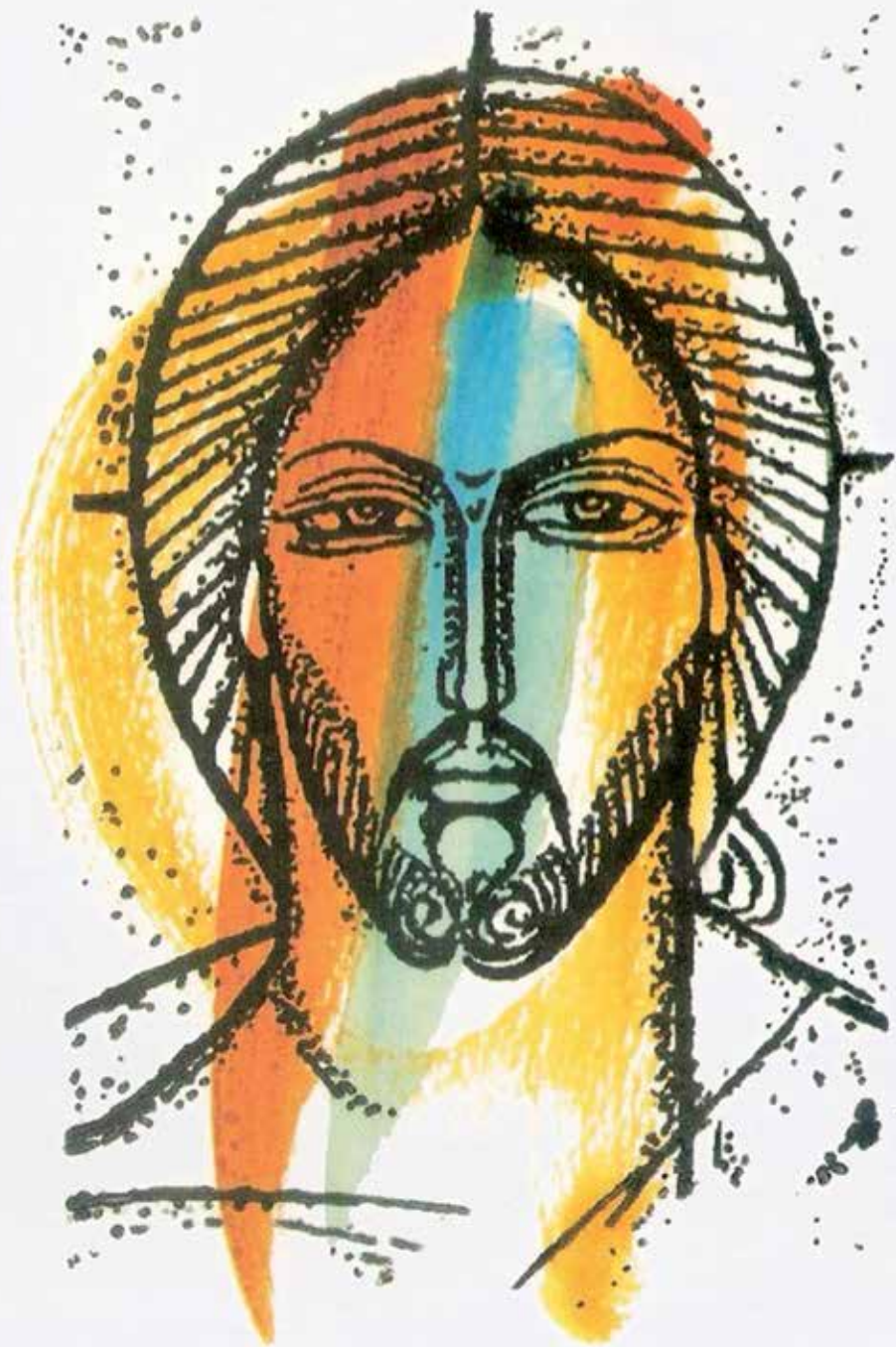
²² As Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer said well: “*We are to make known the Savior of the world to the peoples!*” Without the identity of our charism, our lives (religious and lay) lose their focus and heart. (See Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, Exchange of Ideas, ANNALES 1936, vol. IV, n° IV p. 180, citing Fr. Jordan).

another, with a sense of belonging and fraternal love. During this important Salvatorian Feast, I send you all my blessing and wish for a holy and happy Nativity of the Divine Savior!



Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Filipe J. J. S." with a stylized flourish.

Superior General





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