

**The Idea of the Salvatorian Family: A Thought for the Future**  
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**Introduction:**

One of the great moments in the history of the Salvatorian Family came in 2007, when the Salvatorian Family Charter was provisionally approved by the international leadership of the three branches of the Salvatorian Family. (It would later be definitively approved in October 2012.) The approval of the Salvatorian Family Charter was both a conclusion of a long process to return to the original charism of our Founder in the wake of Vatican II, but it also signaled a new beginning, giving rise to the question: so what next?

In the course of this article, the author will briefly review both the original vision of Father Jordan and also the steps that took place after Vatican II to involve the laity as members of the Salvatorian Family and to achieve closer collaboration among the three branches of the Salvatorian Family. (An excellent source for a more detailed account of Jordan's vision and the post-Vatican II attempt to recover it can be found in *Annales, Vol. XVI, No. 2*).<sup>1</sup> I will then propose two major questions for consideration: 1) what might collaboration look like in the future, and 2) what could be the benefits of seeking further canonical recognition of the Salvatorian Family? Due to the brevity of the article, possible models will be proposed, which hopefully will lead to further reflection on the opportunities that stand before the Salvatorian Family.

**Father Jordan's Original Vision:**

A variety of Salvatorian works have outlined what Fr. John Baptist (later Francis Mary of the Cross) Jordan originally envisioned. Jordan's plan was to found the Apostolic Teaching Society, which would be comprised of priests and laity working together to further the advance of God's Kingdom in the world. The Society would be composed of three grades, based upon level of involvement.

The first grade would be comprised of priests and laity who left all behind, in the spirit of the original Apostles, to work full time in the Society's various apostolates (in the beginning, printing press and missionary work and quickly expanding into education). The second grade was for professionals, especially in the fields of the printing press and education, who would remain in their positions and re-evangelize a world that was growing increasingly secularized. Finally, the third grade was to be comprised of people from all walks of life, the craftsmen, workers, housewives, and

**“The Salvatorian Family is an expression of the charism, the gift of the Spirit given to Father Jordan for the Church. We trace our common roots back to the Apostolic Teaching Society, founded by Father Jordan on 8 December 1881 in Rome. Diocesan priests were its first members. Therese von Wüllenweber (later Blessed Mary of the Apostles) committed herself to this Society in 1882. Large numbers of laity of all ages joined this foundation.”**

***Charter #2***

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<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Father Michael Piela, SDS, outlines Father Jordan's original vision, Father Scott Jones, SDS, discusses the first foundation of the Salvatorian Associates, and Father Mario Agudelo outlines the major steps leading to the Salvatorian Family Charter. *Annales*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (Rome: Society of the Divine Savior, 2010).

others, who would support the mission of the Apostolic Teaching Society in whatever way possible.

Without doubt, Jordan was a young, idealistic diocesan priest who initially had little understanding of canonical structures and how to work within them. A pivotal moment came in March 1883, when Jordan took vows as a religious, adopting the habit and a religious name. A second important—albeit painful—moment in Jordan’s growth was in October 1885, when the Roman community of Sisters was removed from his jurisdiction to become the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother (the enduring female branch of the Society would be formally established in 1888 in collaboration with Therese (later Mother Mary of the Apostles) von Willenweber. This rapid transformation from a Society with three levels to two canonically distinct religious institutes tempered Jordan’s original vision with the reality of the Church of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the process of this transformation, the laity were increasingly relegated to the status of sodality members and minor collaborators. For the remainder of Jordan’s life, until his death in 1918, the Society of the Divine Savior and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior evolved along the lines of the standard apostolic religious institutes that emerged during these years.

## **Recovering the Vision after Vatican II:**

The Vatican II document *Perfectae Caritatis* (“The Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life”) urged institutes of consecrated life to return to the charism of their founders. In the case of the Society and the Congregation, this led to in-depth research into the foundation of the Apostolic Teaching Society and the work and writings of Father Jordan and Mother Mary of the Apostles. For many Salvatorians, this was their first real exposure to Jordan and his original vision. What was clear from the beginning of this recovery of Jordan was that Jordan intended a much more collaborative model between the members of the Society and the Congregation, with active participation on the part of the laity. (In fact, for most of Salvatorian history, there were no “laity” among Salvatorians, other than the non-ordained members of the Society and the Congregation.) While most Salvatorian institutions had some lay employees and benefactors, they were in no way considered “Salvatorians.”

It was also clear that there was no way to recover exactly Jordan’s original Apostolic Teaching Society, with its three grades. Any attempt to do so would result in the wholesale destruction of a century of historical developments among Salvatorians. But in the United States, beginning at the Fourteenth Provincial Chapter (1970), the feasibility of establishing an associate program was considered, and Director of Renewal Father Ramon Wagner was commissioned to begin the process. Within five years, not only had an associate program been developed, but at the Twelfth General Chapter of the Society (1975), the North American Province’s Associate Program was recognized as in keeping with Father Jordan’s original intent and given encouragement, with the proviso that the canonical status of the Society as an institute of religious life not be compromised.<sup>2</sup>

Over the next several years, the international Society continued the work of establishing lay associates.<sup>3</sup> Following the original foundation in the U.S., associate programs were established in other units, first in Brazil and Austria, and then expanding through most of the Salvatorian world. At the Thirteenth General Chapter (1981), the following ordinance was approved: “The XIII General Chapter directs that the Generalate conduct a study of the

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<sup>2</sup> A full account of the first five years of the North American Associate Program can be found in Father Scott Jones’ “The Founding of the Lay Salvatorians in the U.S.A. Province, 1970-75 (ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> For those seeking a more in-depth telling of the growth of the Lay Salvatorians, as well as the development of the Salvatorian Family, see Father Mario Agudelo’s “The Third Branch of the Salvatorian Family: Some Historical Facts from 1975 to 2007.” The information found in this paragraph is drawn from Agudelo’s work (ibid.).

relationship between the Society and the lay people joined with us in the spirit and apostolic purpose of the Founder.”<sup>4</sup>The Fourteenth General Chapter (1987) continued the endorsement, which led to the establishment of an international commission comprised of representatives from all three branches to study the closer relationship between the Society and the Lay Salvatorians. The first meeting of the International Association of the Divine Savior (held in Rome in 1990) and the second meeting (held in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1992) furthered both the understanding of the vocation and charism of the Lay Salvatorian as well as the closer collaboration between the three branches of what was more frequently referred to as the “Salvatorian Family.” At the Sixteenth General Chapter of the Society (1999), endorsement was given both to the creation of a constitution for the Lay Salvatorians as well as to the drafting of an international document on the Salvatorian Family (which ultimately became the Salvatorian Family Charter, provisionally approved by the three leadership teams in 2007, and definitively approved by the three branches in 2012).

**Today the Salvatorian Family has three: the Society of the Divine Savior, The Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior, and the International Community of the Divine Savior. We are united by our commitment to the mission as envisioned by our Founder, forming one family of zealous apostles who announce to all the salvation that has appeared in Jesus Christ...”**

### ***Charter #3***

The Salvatorian Charter itself is a milestone in recovering Jordan’s original vision, if not his original structure. In article 2, the Charter states that “The Salvatorian Family is an expression of the charism, the gift of the Spirit given to Father Jordan for the Church. We trace our common roots back to the Apostolic Teaching Society, founded by Father Jordan on 8 December 1881 in Rome.”<sup>5</sup> It defines itself further in article 3 [at right].<sup>6</sup> The Charter goes on to define the mission, the spirituality, and the collaboration of the Salvatorian Family, respecting both the common charism and the unique identities of the three branches. The Salvatorian Family Charter can certainly be seen as the conclusion of an important chapter in

Salvatorian history, the return to Jordan’s original vision.

### **What Next?**

If the approval of the Salvatorian Family Charter is the end of one chapter in Salvatorian history, it is equally the beginning of a new chapter. What might this new chapter include? How can the Salvatorian Family live out this gift received from Father Jordan, so recently recovered?

In article 14 of the Charter, it states that “As a Salvatorian Family, we seek to provide a visible witness of men and women from diverse cultures and backgrounds working side-by-side in mission.” Article 17 calls for each country/unit to establish a national coordinating team with representatives from each branch. For those units who have established collaborative endeavors, experience shows that effective collaboration demands much time, discernment, and mutual respect. It is a sad fact of Salvatorian history, as well as the history of the Church, that men (as opposed to women) have tended to hold the decision-making

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<sup>4</sup> Reprinted in *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Salvatorian Family Charter*, approved October 2012.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

positions, and that the ordained (as opposed to laity) have also held dominance. For genuine collaboration to occur that history has to be acknowledged and clear measures adopted which facilitate open communication and a new, consensus-driven model of making decisions.

In the United States, a structure was adopted which became the Joint Leadership Group (JLG). Established in 1991, the JLG is comprised of three members of the leadership teams of each of the three branches (e.g. in the case of the Society and the Congregation, the provincial, vicar provincial, and one consultant from each of the two groups). Respecting the necessity for each branch to address its own internal governance and issues, the JLG makes decisions that affect the Salvatorian Family as a whole. It has its own budget, and, whenever possible, new ministries are established collaboratively, with initial funding coming from the JLG. An excellent example of a collaborative ministry established by the JLG in the United States is the Jordan Ministry Team, a Salvatorian ministry in the Diocese of Tucson, Arizona, that provides formation for lay ministers in a diocese that has no Catholic college or university to form the laity for ministry. Its original team members included a Salvatorian priest, a Salvatorian Sister, and a Lay Salvatorian.

While each branch of the Salvatorian Family possesses its own sponsored ministries, if the Salvatorian Family Charter is to be truly transformative, it is crucial that every new ministry be evaluated for its collaborative potential, and, whenever possible, be established collaboratively. In different parts of the world, cultural issues will need to be treated with sensitivity, but with the assistance of the international leadership teams and the wisdom gained from regular international gatherings, new ways of collaborating will help the Salvatorian Family model a Vatican II image of the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A related, albeit sensitive issue, is that of further canonical recognition for the Salvatorian Family. As it stands, the Society and the Congregation are pontifical institutes of religious life, and the International Community of the Divine Savior is seeking canonical recognition as a Public Association of the Faithful by the Holy See via the Pontifical Council for the Laity.<sup>7</sup> Even once the International Community of the Divine Savior is canonically recognized, it remains that the Salvatorian Family Charter has no canonical definition or recognition, other than that which the three branches of the Salvatorian Family assign to it. Seeking formal canonical recognition of the Salvatorian Family demands ongoing discernment and work, but in the opinion of this author it is crucial for the future. Older units in North America and Western Europe have been in a state of numerical decline for decades, and younger units are sometimes operating in areas where canonical status is the only protection in cultures that don't value the equality of the sexes or a collaborative model between clerics and the laity. Canonical recognition of the overarching structure will help to ensure an authentic implementation of the Charter and gain the needed respect of local ecclesiastical authorities.

**“...Just as Father Jordan’s original project evolved over time, we are open to where the Spirit will lead us in the future.”**  
**Charter #3**

While every ecclesial family has its own history and peculiar traits, many of the newer communities have based themselves on collaborative models. Opus Dei, Miles Jesu, and the Legion of Christ (with its auxiliary group Regnum Christi) are three examples. Older communities have also sought canonical recognition of the collaborative relationship between their branches. One of the better known examples is Saint Vincent Pallotti’s Union of the

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<sup>7</sup> In March 2011, the request was made to the Pontifical Council for the Laity; as of June 2015, the process of pontifical recognition is still underway.

Catholic Apostolate (UAC), founded by Pallotti in 1835. Pallotti's original description of the UAC was: "The Catholic Apostolate, that is the universal apostolate, which is common to all classes of people, consists in doing all that one must and can do for the greater glory of God and for one's own salvation and that of one's neighbor."<sup>8</sup> In time, Pallotti founded the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (the Pallottine Priests and Brothers), the Congregation of the Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate, and the Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate. Various lay groups were also founded. Seeking formal canonical recognition of the "Pallottine Family," in 2003, the Vatican Pontifical Council for the Laity declared the Union of the Catholic Apostolate to be a Public Association of the Faithful.<sup>9</sup> As a result, any Pallottine priest, brother, sister, or layperson is by definition also a member of the overarching canonically-recognized Union of the Catholic Apostolate.

It would benefit the Salvatorian Family to consider how it might likewise receive canonical recognition. While canonical protection should be a major motivation, perhaps the greatest resulting benefit would be the model it would provide to the Universal Church. Fifty years out from the Second Vatican Council, the charisms of consultation and collaboration have made great strides, especially in our current age of Pope Francis. But there is still much work to be done to make it a lived reality throughout the Global Church. If the Salvatorian Family is to have a major place at the table, then canonical recognition will provide ecclesiastical "clout" that could play a major role in the reduction of clericalism and sexism within the Church.

## **Conclusion**

The Salvatorian Family has many milestones: 1881 (the establishment of the Apostolic Teaching Society), 1883 (its transformation into an institute of religious life), and 1888 (the enduring establishment of the Congregation). Newer units have their own milestones of establishment and growth. No doubt in the future, 2007 and 2012 will be celebrated as the pivotal dates in which the Salvatorian Family Charter was approved. What events of the future will be recognized as Salvatorian milestones? While only God knows the answer, it is certain that future milestones will be based on the newly recovered collaborative vision of Father Jordan himself. May all Salvatorians work together to found these new milestones, for the benefit of the Salvatorian Family, but especially for the growth of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that is thoroughly collaborative and rooted in baptismal equality!

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Re-read the Salvatorian Family Charter in light of this article.
  - a. Note words or phrases that speak to you and ask, "What is this saying to me and how will I respond?"
  - b. What could be some implications for the Salvatorian Family in your area of the world, and/or globally?
2. In light of this article, if you were to revise the Salvatorian Family Charter, what would you add or change?
3. Where do you see the pros and cons of the Salvatorian Family being officially recognized by the Vatican?
4. What are your dreams and visions for the Salvatorian Family? How does your being a part of it impact your life as a Salvatorian?

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<sup>8</sup> "UAC/SAC", The Pallottine Worldwide Web.

<sup>9</sup> At the 1997 U.S.A. Salvatorian Assembly in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Fr. Dennis Thiessen, SDS, proposed that the Salvatorians consider seeking a similar canonical recognition. At the time, it was decided that more work needed to be done in discerning Salvatorian identity.