

**TOWARDS A SALVATORIAN THEOLOGY OF SALVATION
IN THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE¹
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Introduction

Today's world is in trouble due to lack of peace and we dare not forget the tragic terrorist attack 9/11 of New York. The world lives under fear of terrorism which hits and harms anywhere, at anytime. Terrorists hit Paris very recently killing journalists and some time ago in Kenya massacring 150 innocent students' lives. Since terrorists aim to destroy life, no one knows who or what will be the next target. Life is being threatened, spoiled, destroyed, and endangered. In a word, life is totally desecrated and devalued.

Looking at all these challenges which bring our world to its knees, through bloodshed and fire, one has to ask himself / herself, why is all this happening? Where are we going to end up? Whatever may be the answer, one thing is sure: "our differences, instead of being a source of mutual enrichment, have become a threat to our unity". In short, the slogan has become "difference kills!" You cannot live unless you become "me" – unless you become my race, my culture, my gender, my ideology and my religion. In face of all these challenges, what to do? As for me, we have to look at our families; we have to find new ways to reach and save our families. The family is no longer the oasis of togetherness and "being with"; instead it has become an abyss of selfishness and a place of nourishment for egocentric desires.

What is our stand or where are we as *Salvatorians* as our world is becoming a jungle facing disaster and chaos? We are called to unveil the blanket of our small world, our so called comfort zone, and to go to the existential peripheries of our world and thus bring true life in Jesus Christ to them. Salvatorians are called to kick –off and go out of their "clubs" to spread salvation in the public places. Salvation should be on the road where real people live and face the real challenges of life. Salvation is no longer an empty word rather it bears a human face and a concrete context. It is in this context of unthinkable violence, which destroys innocent lives that Salvatorians are to be the voice of the voiceless. Blind violence spreads misery, sickness, poverty and hatred. As Salvatorians, the contextualization of our charism makes us fight against the privatization of salvation because that leads us to disaster. The world has lost the sense of togetherness and of being one family of and with God. Pope Francis rightly said: "The privatization of salvation is the wrong path". The Lord always saves among the people. From the moment God called Abraham, He promised to make Abraham a people. For this reason, the pope thinks: "We must consider how to rouse one another. Salvation is not only for "me". If I understand salvation in that way, I am mistaken; I am on the wrong path."² The Pope wants to remind us that while God has saved us individually, throughout the history salvation has always been within the context of a people.

It is for this reason that I strongly believe that the Salvatorian theology of salvation has to talk to the families. We are the world, we are the Church; we are the Family of God and with

¹ Substantial works have been done throughout our Salvatorian history to dig and delve into the understanding of Salvation in the mind of our Venerable founder and in the life of our Salvatorian family. The contributions of Fr. Arno Boesing on this topic of *Salvation* are very helpful: *Contributions on Salvatorian History, Charism, and spirituality* (Volume Five). On my side, I do think that time has come not to repeat what others have already said but to use their contributions and apply them to our own context. For me, the only way to draw out the deeper meaning of "salvation" by drawing connections between the Charter and Salvatorian sources is to bring this reality to existential peripheries of our world. It is only there that Salvation becomes tasteful and desirable.

² www .Zenit.org, Rome, January 29, 2015

God. As a Church, as Salvatorians, we are called to contribute vividly by encouraging the globalization of life against the culture of death, which apparently overwhelms our current world as the church is reflecting on the topic of the family through the Synods of Bishops.

1. View of Fr. Francis Jordan and his understanding of the Foundation

Among many talks given by our Venerable Founder Francis Jordan, the one of 13/01/1899 on *Unity* strikes me most because of its clarity and its specificity on the originality of his Foundation. He said:³ “Each Institute has its own spirit, and as soon as you stray you go down the wrong track. An apple tree,” he continues, “is not a pear tree.” Or in our African context “a mango tree is not an orange tree”. He underscores: “A Franciscan is not a Dominican; a Jesuit is not a Trappist.” A Salvatorian, I add, is not a Salesian.

In other words, the Venerable Father is noting things clearly by underlining the originality of his Foundation and by refusing any wrong idea that considers his New Foundation as a cut and paste creation. The New Foundation is his copyright though having God as the common denominator with other existing foundations. He wondrously notices it again in the same talk:⁴ “You know that both St. Ignatius and St. Cajetan were founders of religious orders. They both founded orders but they were so far apart they held virtually opposite principles! St. Cajetan prohibits begging. He expects everything (to come) from divine Providence. But, St. Ignatius expressly orders (with few exceptions) that all should be quite financially sound. The venerable founder Cottolengo left everything to Providence. The other, Don Bosco, begs throughout the whole world by writing. Nevertheless, both are led by God—by one and the same God.”

For Father Francis Jordan, although God is the common key to all the existing foundations, every foundation is specifically unique in and by its spirit and its mission. The essence of Father Jordan’s Foundation resides in the mission of his foundation, which is to bring SALVATION to all creatures.

1.1 The Spirit of the Founder: Jesus is the Savior

1.1.1 In the Spiritual Diary

What is the spirit of the Founder for his New Foundation? On the very first page of his *Spiritual Diary*, we come across this MISSION-PROGRAM-WORD of our Venerable Founder in: *O.A.M.D.G.E.A.S.A.: Omnes Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam Et Ad Salutem Animarum*”, meaning, “All for the greater glory of God and for the Salvation of souls” or “To God alone be honor and glory, and for the salvation of souls”. Our Founder frequently used this very fundamental formula like a signature as you find it in his *Spiritual Diary*.⁵

The word “Salvation” appears 66 times in the *Spiritual Diary* and the word “Savior” appears 31 times. This shows that this word “SALVATION” had a very powerful impact in Fr. Jordan’s life and it is especially sufficient to point out his vision of Salvatorian identity.

1.1.2 In SDS Constitutions

The same observation can be drawn from the Constitutions (of the Society of the Divine Savior) when we read article 101 on *Our Salvation Call and Mission*. We read: “The kindness and love of God for humanity have appeared in Jesus Christ. In him, the one true Savior of the world, all people are called to union with God and one another to form the People of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and out of concern for the salvation of all Father Francis Maris of the Cross Jordan founded the Society of the Divine Savior and gave it the

³ Talks of Father Francis Jordan, 1899/01/13, p. 265.

⁴ Talks of Father Francis Jordan, 1899/01/13, p. 265-266.

⁵SD I (1/2), p. 1 ; SD I (67/3), p. 36-37 ; SD I (176/1)

apostolic purpose to announce to all people that Jesus is the Savior”. And article 109 says: “The Society is dedicated to the Divine Savior”.

This article underscores Jesus as the source and origin of Salvation. He is the Savior and the Primordial Sacrament of the encounter with the Father. It is through Him that salvation reaches the entire humanity. This idea is clearly expressed in the *Charter of the Salvatorian Family*.

1.1.3 In the Charter of the Salvatorian Family

We read in Chapter One of the Salvatorian Charter on *Our Call and Charism*: “Today the Salvatorian Family has three autonomous branches: 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. (Titus 3:4) Just as Father Jordan’s original project evolved over time, we are open to where the Spirit will lead us in the future”.⁶ Jesus is the channel par excellence of salvation. In a word, Jesus is not only the Savior of the world but also the SALVATION.

As I previously mentioned, the spirit of the New Foundation of the Founder was hidden in the mission of his Foundation as the Charter stipulates it in its chapter 2, article 5, on *Our Mission*. Our Salvatorian mission is to spread salvation to the whole creation and especially to the families. The family is seriously threatened and it is undergoing a serious time of crisis.

When we reflect deeply on our human and spiritual life to see what we are, many of us then realize that we are what we are mainly because of the education, formation, and basic trust received from our parents in the family. We can hardly deny that the family is truly the first school, which initiates children into all kinds of human relationships. The family becomes the *ecclesiola*, the little church, whereby parents faithfully transmit proper faith to their children. In the language of the Second Vatican Council, the Christian family is a ‘Domestic Church’⁷ and a ‘Domestic sanctuary of the Church.’⁸ In it parents are called to be first preachers of the faith to their children.⁹ In view of this, Cardinal Murphy - O’Connor splendidly argues,¹⁰ “Nor should one ignore the fact that parents themselves share in the teaching authority of the Church. It is axiomatic that it is within the Christian family itself that children are taught to worship God and love their neighbor according to the faith given to them in baptism. If the Church really is a family of faith, one will find that the duty of teaching the faith and learning the faith is focused not only in the hierarchy of the Church but also at every level where the

**“Following in the footsteps
of the Savior like the
apostles, we are called to
live and announce God’s
unconditional love,
continuing Jesus’
life-giving work of
bringing salvation to all
creation and liberation
from all that is a threat to
fullness of life.**

Charter #5

⁶*Charter of the Salvatorian Family*, 1.

⁷LG 11.

⁸AA11: “The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfill this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need.”

⁹LG 12.

¹⁰C. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *The Family of the Church*, Darton Longman and Todd, London, p. 11.

Christian community comes together. Thus, in the school, the home, the parish, there will be a relationship between the teacher and the teaching that serves to deepen the unity of the whole family of the Church.”

Bearing this in mind, John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, in the seventeenth paragraph, clearly declares, “The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.” The Synod adds some elements to this: “Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of the society on which the social edifice is built. The Christian family of Africa will thus become a true domestic church, contributing to society’s progress towards a more fraternal life.”¹¹ So, the crisis of the Church is actually the crisis of the family. The faith of the Church depends much on the faith of the family. Perhaps we can paraphrase the common French proverb *Tel père, tel fils*, “like father, like son” as *Telle famille, tel monde*; “Like family, like world”; or *Telle famille, telle Eglise*, which could literally mean, “like family, like Church”. The world is the true mirror of the family; that means one understands the world better by looking at the family. There is no bad world if there is no bad family. The Salvatorian charter has touched the essence of the Church’s mission by reminding us to bring salvation to all that diminishes the fullness of life of the family. Beware that we cannot succeed unless, as the Salvatorian Charter exhorts us, “Our personal and communal experience of salvation is the dynamic and animating energy for our mission”.

2. The Mission of Fr. Francis Jordan

2.1 Who is a Salvatorian?

Understanding Fr. Francis Jordan in his Founding mission follows from the way he defines a Salvatorian. On Good Friday, 13/04/1900, he delivered a sustentative exhortation on this topic. He said: “A Salvatorian is a savior of the world: *est Salvator mundi*”. He does not speak of the Christian world but of the entire world without any discrimination because “... *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him*” (Jn 3:17). He continues: “If you want to call yourselves *Salvatores mundi*, you must seek to become like the Savior”. Saint Paul knew this when he declared: “*for me to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Ph. 1:21).

This Christocentric theology brings to my mind the image of a soldier of Christ as Tertullian expresses it when he defines *sacramentum sacrum sermentum est*. By baptism, says Tertullian, one has made a sacred oath to become the soldier of Christ. Among the many virtues of being a soldier obedience, discipline, courage and perseverance are the most expected. Fr. Francis Jordan is saying almost the same thing by underlining only two virtues: “If you want to call yourself *Salvatores mundi*, you must seek to become like the Savior especially in these two things: obedience and suffering!” Never shrink from obedience in *omnibus*, in everything”, he underscores.¹² Lastly, it seems that for our Founder that being Salvatorian is to be obedient to Christ in each and everything as a soldier is obedient to his superior. Moreover, nowadays, the soldier is supposed to be clever and intelligent enough so that he/she can manipulate the modern and sophisticated weapons against the enemies. Nevertheless, being a soldier of Christ requires a type of armor that the mere human mind cannot easily grasp. Saint Paul amazingly describes this armor for us in the letter to Ephesians 6:11-18: “*Put on the full armor of God so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens. That is why you must take up all God's armor, so you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. So stand your ground, with truth as a belt*

¹¹For more information see, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 80-85.

¹²Talk 1900/04/13, p. 384-385.

round your waist, and uprightness as a breastplate, wearing eagerness to spread the gospel of peace for shoes on your feet and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to quench the burning arrows of the Evil One. And then you must put on salvation as your helmet and take up the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God. In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people..."

Unless we wear this armor, we cannot be called soldiers of Christ. Our Venerable Father was totally right when he admonished his sons and daughters "to live as true Salvatorians". "Oh how I wish", he says, "that in these days you would really fathom what it means to call yourselves *Salvatores mundi*, Saviors of the world". In short, "a Salvatorian is a savior of the world. The Redeemer and Savior of the world became obedient unto death, even death on the cross".¹³ The Founder goes to say "be Salvatorians through steadfast obedience even to the point of crucifixion! Be Salvatorians in sufferings even up to crucifixion; seek to become like the Savior so that you will not be found unworthy".¹⁴

3. In the Cross is Salvation

3.1 Nothing grows except in the shadow of the cross

As I mentioned previously, the talk of the understanding of being Salvatorian is one of the fieriest talks of our Venerable Founder. For me, this talk should actually be considered, with all its theological weight, in light of the fact that it was given on Good Friday, the day of our redemption, the day of our salvation, as the liturgy highlights by this ritual: "*Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world. Come, let us adore*".¹⁵ We know that our Venerable Founder had a very deep spirituality of the cross which leads me to conclude that the whole of Jordan spirituality is hidden in the spirituality of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote: "the works of God prosper only in the shadow of the cross".¹⁶ He

**"The witness of
Father Jordan and
Blessed Mary of the
Apostles inspires us
to...embrace the
Cross for the sake of
our mission..."**

Charter # 12

continues: "But we should glory in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in which is our SALVATION, life and resurrection".¹⁷ The theology of SALVATION develops in the shadow of the cross because "the cross is our life..., the cross is our crown, the cross is our glory, the cross is our hope, the cross is our shield, the cross is our protection, the cross is our portion, the cross is our joy"¹⁸ says our Venerable Father. To underline the close relationship between salvation and cross, the Venerable Founder gave another challenging admonition: "why are we afraid of taking up the cross, which leads to the Kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life... in the cross is the overflow of heavenly sweetness. In the cross is perfection of sanctity.

So take up your cross, and follow Jesus, and you shall go into everlasting life"¹⁹ because "nothing grows except in the shadow of the cross".²⁰

At this point, it becomes clear that the Salvatorian Theology of salvation as wished by the Venerable Founder finds its inner meaning in the paschal mystery under the shadow of the

¹³Talk 1900/04/13, p. 384-385.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵Ritual of the Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday.

¹⁶ SD I (163/6)

¹⁷ SD I (180)

¹⁸ SD I (179/3)

¹⁹ SD I (189/1,2)

²⁰ SD II (73/4)

cross which actually motivates its members to become vehicles of salvation that has appeared in Jesus Christ or *Salvatores mundi* par excellence. And it is possible only when “our personal and communal experience of salvation is the dynamic and animating energy for our mission”.²¹ Let us not forget that in the cross is salvation, in the cross is life... The question is what kind of life is that? Jesus gives the answer by the way he reacted to Nicodemus: “*The Son of Man must be lifted as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him*” (Jn 3:15-16). Hence, salvation is relatively simple to welcome because, as Jesus says, it is just a matter of lifting up our eyes to the Crucified in order to be granted grace and pardon, which are the source of true life. God’s Lordship is totally revealed on the Cross in a very mysterious clarity as we sing *Reginabis a lingo Deus*, meaning that God reigns while he is being crucified. This leads us to affirm that the theology of salvation goes hand in hand with the theology of the cross. Where there is the cross, there is also salvation as well as life.

3.2 *Salvation is Life*

Salvation under the shadow of the cross is highly portrayed in John 17:3: “*Eternal life is this: To know You, the One True God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*”. Among many commentaries on this verse, I chose that of Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* (Part II) who notes, “Eternal life is not - as the modern reader might immediately assume - life after death, in contrast to this present life, which is transient and not eternal. ‘Eternal life’ is life itself, real life, which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death. This is the point: to seize ‘life’ here and now, real life that can no longer be destroyed by anything or anyone.”²²

The way Ratzinger comments on this verse, by viewing it in relation to the raising of Lazarus is purely Salvatorian: “‘He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die’ (Jn 11:25-26). ‘Because I live, you will live also’, says Jesus to his disciples at the last supper (Jn 14:19), and he thereby reveals once again that a distinguishing feature of the disciple of Jesus is the fact that he ‘lives’; beyond the mere fact of existing, he has found and embraced the real life that everyone is seeking. On the basis of such texts, the early Christians called themselves simply ‘the living’... They had found what all are seeking – life itself, full and, hence, indestructible life”.²³ The Christian does not believe in a multiplicity of things. Ultimately he believes, quite simply, in God: he believes that there is only one God who becomes accessible through the one he sent, Jesus Christ. It is in the encounter with him that we experience the recognition of God that leads to communion and thus to “life”. “Eternal life is thus a relational event. Man did not acquire it from himself or for himself alone. Through relationship with the one who is himself life, man too comes alive.”²⁴

3.3 *Life for Africans*

Having this in mind, we should look at the African life as ‘being with’. By our very nature, we Africans are ‘being with’. That means, we are being taught from our very youth through sayings and proverbs that any human being is powerless without the family community and communion. There are popular African proverbs such as *Mtu ni Watu*, which can literally be translated as “Man is Men” and the second *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa*, which means, “one finger does not pick out a louse.” These sayings emphasize the dimension of togetherness and underscore the fact that the family is the first place of education and human formation. The family, so to say, is the first school where every person experiences and tastes

²¹ *Charter of the Salvatorian Family*, 5.

²² J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, 82-83.

²³ J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, 72.

²⁴ J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, 84.

the life of community-communion. There is no individual life, and life outside the community has no meaning. Anyone living outside the community-communion is considered as a living dead. There is no longer life in him or her because to live is to 'be with'. And to be with is to be in harmony with the community-communion. Once the 'being with' is broken, the member loses his/her integrity and lacks energy and vital force. In order to avoid such disastrous situations, parents repeat this principle of life unceasingly to their children: 'I am because you are; and without you, I am not; you and I are the community.'²⁵ The moral behind this is to incorporate as much as possible the individual into the large community-communion of brothers and sisters, as the African Synod Fathers emphasized.²⁶

By its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household; it is oriented towards society. The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is in the family that citizens are born and it is from within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.

In this sense of 'being with', Africans are conscious of their being for and with one another. In *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, the author Van Pelt splendidly expresses the same idea: "Africans feel responsible for one another and are held responsible for one another by the other groups of related people. They keep in contact with one another and frequently stay with one another. They rely on each other in all circumstances and are very much interested in the family's offspring."²⁷ This is how the extended family in Africa operates. It creates the 'being with' ready to relate to others, to help them, to live with them and die for them. Van Pelt goes on to stress that, "as the nuclear family is only a cell in the extended family, it is natural that the children belong to the extended family."²⁸ In our tribe, we consider the nuclear family as an island. And no one can live as an island; he will soon die. Africans are called to be open to others, to 'be with'. This is why an African is evaluated more by what he is than what he has. "To be with" or "not to be with" is the radical question for Africans. To have or not to have comes afterwards. In fact, an African might get rich, but the wealth is not his/her alone. It is for the whole family, because his/her being is always 'being with'. Otherwise the more he/she has, the less he/she is.

At the same time, we should know that the 'being with' dimension of Africans goes together with their respect for life. Life is the ultimate reality for Africans. On this concern, the Synod declares, "In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. The people of Africa respect the life, which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life"²⁹. The paragraph ends in these words, "Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family."³⁰ So does the church as family. She stands full human life. To use Orobator's words, the church as family is at the service of life. He refers to Bishop Laurent Monsengwo who states that: "In a broader sense the Church as Family must always

²⁵ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Eastern African Publications Ltd, Nairobi, 1994, pp. 108-109; A. E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family. African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1999, pp. 154-155; S. BOCKIE, *Death and the invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief, Indiana*, 1993, p. 10. He is quoted by OROBATOR: 'No one speaks of 'my life' separated from 'our life'.

²⁶ *Ecclesia Africa (EA)*, 85.

²⁷ P. VAN PELT, *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, TMP Book Department, Tabora, 1982, pp. 13-15.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *EA* 43

³⁰ *Ibid*

be present on the side of the forces of life in this great battle that will oppose her against the forces of death until the second coming...”.³¹

To borrow Placide Temples’³² expression, African life is dynamic. Life can either increase or decrease in energy, in vitality or in spirit. But whatever the case, Africans always fight for the increase of life. To show that Africans are fond of life, most of the time they express their need for life through their greetings. For instance, in many African tribes and especially in the Baluba from Kongo, when they meet, they greet one another *moyo* or *kolako*, which means ‘live; be alive’ or ‘be strong’. To live and to be strong are the great aspirations of Africans. Life is sacred and therefore nobody can dispose of it, as he wants. If this is so, that is, if life is the ultimate reality for Africans, where does it find its fullness? Obviously, individual life is rooted in the life of the community. Africans will never conceive life outside of the community because it is the community which gives life and protects it. Whenever life is diminished because of unworthy behavior, African people call for reconciliation through rituals of purification and expiation in the family community. Through the rituals they express their deep religious sense, a sense of the sacred, and of the existence of God the creator and of a spiritual world. They also feel the reality of sin and the need for reparation.³³

The African family, therefore, is a shelter of rest, security, identity, solidarity, community - communion of life, mutual participation, belonging together, listening to one another, and mutual understanding in frank dialogue, etc.. In other words, the philosophy of ‘being with’ and that of ‘increasing life’, which enriches the nature and the mission of the Universal Church, highlights the family in Africa. The Salvatorian theology of salvation in the African context strives to establish a civilization of life against the culture of death which is being given a place of privilege by the ideology of indifference and relativism supported by powerful multinational companies. For us Salvatorians, as far as salvation is concerned, it reminds us of our primordial and fundamental mission of being “saviors of the world” by spreading the culture of life bearing in mind Jesus’ mission par excellence as the original Savior of the world who said: “*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full*” (Jn 10:10). In other words Jesus, the Savior of the world is saying: “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he/she dies*”. (Jn 11:25) Life in the Savior does not end because it is true and everlasting.

4. Our Charism in four words: *Salus tua ego sum*³⁴

As I embark through the synoptic, one of the events in the Gospel of Luke expresses better and deeper insight over this motto, although the Founder has never used this reference in his Spiritual diary. It is the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10: It is said that Zaccheus was

³¹L. MONSENGWO, *L’Eglise famille et images bibliques de l’Eglise*, in *Revue Catholique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest* 14-15 (1996) 121-138.

³²P. TEMPELS. is a Belgian Franciscan Missionary to Congo who wrote the book *La Philosophie Bantoue* in 1947. That was the very first book dealing with African thought. From then on, it aroused many studies for and against him.

³³*Ecclesia in Africa* 42.

³⁴In the Mother House Chapel of Salvatorian Sisters in Rome, there is an icon on the central wall with the logo: “*Salus tua ego sum*; I am your Salvation”. I am always comparing this logo to the gospel of Saint Mark which is short, clear, concise and precise”. Why cannot we use this logo as leitmotiv for the entire Salvatorian family? Where does this logo come from? Some years ago, I undertook some research in order to find out the origin of this sister’s logo. This motto originated from Father Pancracius Pfeifer. In the square of our Mother House, there is a statute of the Divine Savior with these words in Latin: “*Ego Deus Tuus Salvator Tuus*; I am your God and your Salvation”. This Statute was inaugurated in 1925. Furthermore, it is very interesting to know that the same words are found on the Statute of the Savior on the top of the Mother House of the Jesuits. The Jesuits’ Savior can be seen from far away especially during the night because it shines. We can read in the sculpture, this time, in Italian: “*Io sono la Tua Salvezza*”; “*Salus tua ego sum*” and in English “I am Your Salvation”.

seeking not to see Jesus but rather who Jesus was. Zaccheus was a chief tax collector (St Matthew) and also a wealthy man. For sure he was not an ordinary man. His problem was that he could not see Jesus because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. Let us underline one fact: Zaccheus was seeking to see who Jesus was. You can see Jesus without knowing who Jesus really is. You can see Jesus passing by without knowing who Jesus is. Zaccheus took the initiative but he failed to reach the essential. We, by our own and private endeavor, cannot possess God. The initiative must come from God. Zaccheus did his level best: he ran ahead and even climbed a tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. What was the result of his efforts? Instead of Zaccheus seeing Jesus, it was Jesus who looked up and saw him. Jesus' look is extraordinary; it penetrates the bottom of heart. It bears salvation. It rebuilds the lost persons in their intimate relationship with their Creator. A wonderful call originates from Jesus' look: "*Zaccheus come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house*". In other words, Jesus is saying "Today, salvation has come to this house"; "Zaccheus, I am your Salvation".



Zaccheus came down quickly and received Jesus with joy. Salvation transforms one's heart and one's life. It makes someone stand firm on his/her two feet, no longer needing to climb or to look for support other than from the Savior Himself.

Zaccheus stood up and said to the Lord, "*Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over*". Zaccheus by distributing his property to the poor is reciting implicitly Psalm 27: 1: "*The Lord is my light and my salvation*", whom should I fear?" "*Salus tua ego sum*" means in this context "Zaccheus, come down quickly, for today I must stay in your house".

Because of this proclamation of salvation, people started grumbling and said, "*He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner*".

How many people would like to know Jesus, to see who Jesus is, and they cannot because of the crowd which represents the world with all its pleasures, its challenges, its obstacles, its attractions and its indifference. The world is hanging on a tree, a big tree like that of the sycamore tree which Zaccheus climbed. We as Salvatorians must play fully the role of Jesus. We are the ones to look up to the trees of life and to bring salvation to people. To look into the tree is to be able to read the signs of times. Salvation always goes hand in hand with the context of the people to whom we are sent. Pope Francis rightly says: "*I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them*".³⁵ From us Salvatorians, the world awaits Salvation and that is all.

Therefore, "*Salus tua ego sum*" should put all of us in movement. It forces us to abandon old ways of thinking and living our Charism. The question is no longer: *How* are we going to live our Charism in the modern time, but rather, how do people want us to live our Charism in this rapid changing world? For that, the call of Pope Francis should never leave us in peace:

I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. 'Go into all the world'; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. Mk 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and

³⁵ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter, *To all Consecrated People*, Vatican, 27 November 2014

*abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be satisfied by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, and love by giving love. I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, apostolate should be adjusted to new needs.*³⁶

As for me, as I look at the challenges of today's world, the new needs are the families to be catechized so that they may regain their original mission of being the domestic church and consequently of being schools and oases of peace, of salvation and true life. Nobody can deny the pivotal position of the family in every human society. There is no society without family. Hence, the family is the foundation on which the society is built. In this regard evangelization of the family in general and of the African family should be considered as a major priority.³⁷ God Himself elevated and sanctified the institution of the family by His incarnation that is, by choosing to enter human history as Redeemer through a human family. God, therefore, wants to show how open the family is to every human being. So does the Church, the family of God; so should Salvatorians. Proud of our *Salus tua ego sum* we should be at the front line in designing new strategies, new pastoral plans in order to evangelize families and bring Christ in their midst.

Conclusion

All in all, the Salvatorian message is simple and clear: *Salus tua ego sum*; "I am your Salvation". It calls us to be *Salvatores mundi*. The Salvatorian Charter reasserts that call, as I reflect on it and I feel that the words of the logo, *Salus tua ego sum*, should awaken us from our old dogmatic slumbers in the way we live our Charism and mission. The Charter's call should lead us to reach out to the people in their daily existential situations of need. *Salus tua ego sum* should enable us in the public sphere, on the street, and on the journey of life. This call should lead us to families to enkindle in them the resurrected light of the risen Christ because the salvation of the world relies on the salvation of families. The Charter's call should also remind us that we should take an active part in the debate going on in the universal Church so as to avoid being strangers to our own Church.

Our Salvatorian mission calls us to develop apostolic skills. Being broad minded with universal betterment, we should be able to act and think locally, and also be able to act on the universal level. Finally, we are called to bring-SALVATION to the streets, to the neglected, forsaken, unloved, and deprived. We are called to take salvation to people and to their daily existential realities since the Charter tells us that: "We are the world; we are family; we are the Church". May we be so dedicated to the service of others, that the whole human family may become a pleasing sacrifice in honor of the *Salvator mundi*, Jesus Christ!

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. How does the image of the African family shed light on the nature of the Salvation that Salvatorians bear to others?

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ *Ecclesia in Africa*, 80.