

**LIVING IN THE ‘NOW’:
A SALVATORIAN RESPONSE TO THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES
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Looking back is easy. We have been there. We know the past’s terrain and, most of all we made it through. Looking ahead also has its ease. It fuels dreams, plans, ambitions and possibilities. Being in the ‘now’, however, is usually a challenge — we need to figure out where we are going, which path makes the best sense and what we hope to accomplish along the way. As social beings our choices in the present moments are necessarily influenced by what is happening around us. To make good choices it is important to take in that contextual reality.

That means reading and responding to the signs of the times. But what does that really mean

**“Our spirit of
universality... We open
ourselves to the
questions and
challenges of our
historical epoch,
allowing the
signs of the time
to reveal to us the ways
and means to respond.”
Charter #8**

and how does one do it? From every contemporary vantage point and through the lens of widely diverse perspectives people continue to seek to understand the signs of the times as they experience them. This is a subject explored in university courses and colloquia. It is often the springboard for corporate planning in industry and business. The signs of the times are a base rationale for new trends in fashion, in film, in foods, in faith and even in fear. The signs of the times underlie motivational presentations on ‘TED Talks – Ideas Worth Spreading’¹ and during Sunday morning evangelical television sermons. Search the Internet today for ‘signs of the times’ and evangelical predictions of the second coming of Christ pop up readily.²

One could argue that reading the signs of the times has been a human action since the beginning of conscious human action — people trying to give meaning to what is happening. Epic tales,³ sacred books, historical records all utilize signs of the times as a spring board for understanding how events are shaping a needed response that will move people into a secure future. Biblical stories and their characters record examples of this human effort — Noah built an ark to ward off impending doom; Moses led his people out of slavery with promises

¹ <https://www.ted.com/talks>

²“Modern Day Signs of the Times: A Review of Signs Unique to Our Day and Time.”

http://www.lamblion.com/articles/articles_signs2.php

“Fifteen Signs of the Times Indicating Judgment” <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/heres-the-deal/45851-15-signs-of-the-times-indicating-judgment>

³*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), a historical novel by Charles Dickens. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.” (Chapter I - The Period) Note: The opening paragraph of the novel. The two cities referred to were London and Paris during the turmoil of the French Revolution. For the oppressed citizens of 18th-century France, the revolution’s proclamation of the rights of man was indeed a “spring of hope.” But for those of the ancient régime, or the outgoing political system, it was a “winter of despair,” leading to death and destruction. https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/A_Tale_of_Two_Cities

of a better future in a new homeland; prophets cried out to awaken people to see their own complicit ways of living unjustly. Jesus preached often about the Kingdom and what people needed to do to find the Kingdom within and build it up from without.

More importantly for us, how should a Salvatorian read the signs of the times? What challenge do today's signs offer us and how ought we respond?

How we view the world and its 'signs' is a matter of perspective really – one's professional training, one's status and age and sex and culture – all these shape the perspective we have on our experiences and influence the decisions we make about what we experience. Our past does influence our 'now' perspective, but our past should not control the choices we make in the present moment. Because we live from a faith perspective grace nudges us to look at the world with apostolic eyes and hearts.

As Salvatorians we have a wonderful legacy we can draw upon for learning to read the signs of the times from a faith perspective. This legacy is that of our charism, gifted to us by the Holy Spirit through the life, witness and writings of F. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan and Blessed Mary of the Apostles von Wüllenweber.

When we reflect on their lives we begin to discover their unique perspectives. Jordan for example grew up in an impoverished setting where life was difficult. Yet, from a young age, he felt particularly blessed by God and called by God to do something great for souls. He felt a strong call to priesthood coupled with a desire to master languages that would help him reach the broader world of those unaware of the Savior's goodness and kindness.⁴

Jordan was more of a 'now' person than a long-range planner. He suffered with what he saw as the growing lack of faith in Europe. He became convinced of the potential to inspire others to realize that our daily actions are a means for saving souls. The power of the printing press was a tool that seemed so useful for awakening people to this apostolic need. Moreover, he was convinced that "apostles"⁵for his 19th century world cause need not be only clerics and missionaries. He envisioned including men and women, lay and religious in a movement to rekindle faith in action at the grassroots.

He encountered some substantial roadblocks along the way. While establishing the first group of women for his Apostolic Teaching Society, Jordan and the woman he chose as guide differed in their interpretation of the role of vowed poverty. Her dream was to have a group of Sisters faithfully living a radical poverty of lifestyle. Jordan's dream was to harness the discipline of poverty as a means of advancing the apostolate rather than as an expression of a monastic lifestyle. Eventually Church authorities decided to separate that women's group due to these seeming irreconcilable values.

Jordan also withstood pressure from the Church to focus his institute's apostolic work. As Jordan prayed over events and how to best respond he felt his vision required flexibility and openness. He resisted limiting his vision to specific definable parameters. There was conviction and persistence in his genes as outlined in our Salvatorian Charter.⁶

⁴ Jordan's Spiritual Diary IV/37 and Titus 3: 4

⁵ Ibid. I/138 "Oh, Holy Apostles flying through the world evangelizing all!"

⁶ Salvatorian Charter Preface: "Absolutely nothing should be too difficult for you with the help of God's grace. I can do all things in God who strengthens me." From Spiritual Diary II/1-2 (Dec. 20, 1894)

As he struggled to respond to the signs of the times of Europe in the late 1800s with the various setbacks he encountered, he took on the perspective of one choosing to ‘stand in the shadow the cross.’⁷ That is, while he looked at the world’s needs, he was keenly aware of the profound love of Jesus, who died that “all may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) That was the perspective that propelled him forward to found an organization of persons dedicated to advancing that knowledge and love of Jesus as the way toward transformation of the society and the world. “This is eternal life, to know you the one true God and Jesus Christ who you have sent.”(John 17:3) That truth became his beacon for reading and responding to the signs of his times.⁸

As Jordan discerned his response to the signs of his times he believed in inspiring others to become involved and use their own talents and life styles to bring awareness of a loving God into social settings. He was convinced that use of social media of his time was also essential to spread awareness beyond local circles of influence. His eyes remained focused on the mission both at home in Europe and far afield in the mission lands of Africa and Asia. By inviting all lifestyles into his apostolic endeavors he was convinced that the world would become more Christian and therefore more just. The value system he espoused was the perspective out of which sprung his motivation and impetus to carry forward a vision to respond to the signs of the times.

Blessed Mary of the Apostles, on the other hand, was born into nobility and could have led an easy life filled with social activities and travel. Instead she set her eyes on the women who followed Jesus and tended to his needs out of their own means. She was convinced hers was not to be a life of ease nor of leadership. She desired to collaborate, to join others of like mind to enable the work of the Savior to flourish in her day, as had the women in Jesus’ day, who joined him and followed his lead.⁹ Her perspective took an entirely different focus than that of Jordan. She wanted to join a group that was apostolic and contribute by her efforts and her wealth. She sought not to be a leader but a collaborator.¹⁰ Like Jordan standing in the shadow of Jesus’ cross, Blessed Mary looked at her world and longed to be an apostolic woman, using her talents to help Jesus be known and loved by contemporary Europe and in the missions.¹¹

Salvatorians continue to be challenged to view the many signs defining our world’s situation. Because of technology there is practically no part of our world of which we are ignorant, if we are awake and alert. What are the signs of the times of this new millennium? How are

“Moved by a deep experience of God, the situation of the Church, and the reality of his time, Father Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan was filled with an urgent desire that all people know the one true God and experience fullness of life through Jesus the Savior. His vision was to unite all the apostolic forces in the Church to love and proclaim Jesus as the Savior to a world in need of God. He included people from all ages and all walks of life, working together everywhere and by all ways and means.”

Charter #1

⁷ “The works of God prosper only in the shadow of the cross.” Spiritual Diary I/163

⁸ Salvatorianer Chronik vol. 3 (1919), no.2, 2-12 Jordan told F. Pancratius Pfeiffer that when he stood on Mt. Lebanon and looked over the Holy Land and let the multifaceted needs pass through his mind he heard in his mind clearer than ever before the words of the Savior – John 17:3.

⁹ Studia Historia Salvatoriana Sectio 1.0 MM ‘A Short Biography’, pg. 15 “I liked best to study in Holy Scripture how, in the time of Jesus the apostles and devout women worked together for Christ.”

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 26 “...Mission sisters matched my inclination exactly – making a start myself less. ...”

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 13 “I was totally taken up with enthusiasm of the missions.”

people responding to what they see unfolding? Can we make sense of events that *now* shape human history?

The power and pervasiveness of Internet and cell phone technology has connected humanity like no other phenomenon in history. Technology has created awareness and expanded horizons on issues that were not talked about in years past. This same technology has simultaneously created a greater diversity in our thinking. There is growing acceptance of differing sexual orientations, including gay, transgender and bisexual identities.¹² Family is no longer defined as a mother-father-children household, but includes single parents with children, blended families, or same sex couples nurturing children. The expanding role of women has given both women and men access to more choices about how to develop their talents and live life.

“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.”

(Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15)

Charter #5

Technology and Internet communication have put the tools of social media into the hands of governments, educators, those caught in repressive cultures who want their voices heard, and those from liberal cultures trying to assist those striving for freedom and opportunity. Social media is a central focus for pop stars, film critics, kids in middle school, people seeking self-help groups, those in prayer groups, hobbyists, etc. Social media builds friendships among diverse thinkers. At the same time social media allows for anonymity, which promotes both good and dark qualities. Social media can form a cloak of safety around those who would otherwise suffer reprisals for speaking out. Others simultaneously are able to hide behind a screen of secrecy, which masks their identities and motivations. Friendships, marriage vows and government alliances have all fallen prey to “broken secrets” revealed on the Internet for anyone to read. People disappear and are later rediscovered on social media sites with new identities, sometimes as ‘hookers’ or as ‘terrorists’. The underside of the Internet is in the news almost daily. Now cybercrimes can be perpetrated in anonymity and can reach around the world. Today social media cannot be ignored. It has expanded the familiar ‘playground’, the dangerous battlefield, and the global mission field.

Yet urbanization finds large populations of individuals living side by side without knowing their neighbors. Workspace cubicles cut people off from each other. This depersonalization contributes to treating others as commodities rather than as persons. People become expendable if they stand in the way of increasing the profit margin of a business. The wage gap between rich and poor is growing. In desperation people take chances to find work or just to survive. This, along with climate change,¹³ has caused a pandemic of migration, which in turn fuels human trafficking and the enslavement of persons. Slavery has always been a part of human history. But the number of slaves today is staggering because a vast number of vulnerable people are forced to migrate as they seek work.¹⁴ The poorest people may not

¹²USA Supreme Court Declares Same-Sex Marriage Legal In All 50 States

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages>

¹³ <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/climate-change-already-causing-mass-human-migration-180949530>

¹⁴ Migration statistics <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/wallchart/index.shtml>

even be able to finance migration for the sake of work.¹⁵ The number of refugees and asylum seekers is at a 60-year high.¹⁶ The Internet serves as a tool for luring and exploiting them.

However much of our knowledge comes through the biased views of those in power, who decide what it is we are to know about, where, and for how long before our attention is turned in another direction or we are distracted by pressures close to home.

What ought our perspective on the world to be? How can we remain alert to the signs of the times and choose actions that help promote the ‘fullness of life?’ It is our responsibility to seek out balanced and informed perspectives, also based in faith. If we are faithful to our heritage, to the grace of our Salvatorian charism we also stand in the shadow of the cross of love and walk with the men and women apostles and collaborators into the passageways where there are people suffering and in need of healing kindness and attention.

One of those passageways is that of human trafficking. It has been named as one of the major human rights issues of our day. It is affecting millions of vulnerable people, most directly those who are impoverished due to the injustices of our global political-social-economic environment.

If one begins to explore the reasons why human trafficking occurs and is growing, it becomes clearer and clearer that patriarchy and the subsequent oppression of women and children is one serious cause. Of those affected by trafficking, estimates indicate, 80% are women and children.¹⁷

Another cause is the economic disadvantage of peoples of the second and third worlds. However because of greed and exploitation human trafficking has also begun to touch our youth and young children in first world countries as well.¹⁸

What is human trafficking? Essentially it is the exploitation of vulnerable persons for the sake of monetary gain by the trafficker. According to the Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act,¹⁹ a USA federal law since 2000, “Human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of subjecting that person to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” It takes all forms – exploitation in labor settings, exploitation by sexual coercion, forced surrender of body parts for transplants, forced marriages, etc.

In 2001 the membership of the Union of Superiors General (UISG), the leadership body of international congregations of women religious, held their tri-annual meeting. They discussed the plight of women in the global society and for the first time in its history the UISG published a Declaration²⁰ committing its members to work to overcome the exploitation of women around the world. The image²¹ below depicts the frequency of concepts contained in that statement. Obviously, women and their plight were of primary concern.

¹⁵ “Facts About World Migration” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/02/7-facts-about-world-migration/>

¹⁶ Global Forced Displacement Tops 50 Million for First Time in Post-World War II Era”

<http://www.unhcr.org/53a155bc6.html>

¹⁷ “Trafficking in Persons as a Human Rights Issue” <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44896390.pdf>

¹⁸ Exposing the Forced Prostitution and Human Trafficking of American Children
<http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/09/16/3567922/child-sex-trafficking-united-states/>

¹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/>

²⁰ UISG Declaration 2001 http://www.talithakum.info/EN/documenti/UISG_Declaration_2001.pdf

²¹ The image is a ‘Wordle’ -- a way for generating “word clouds” from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. <http://www.wordle.net/>

indeed walking in Fr. Jordan's footsteps. S. Sheila wanted to meet with trafficked survivors to find out what they needed that had not been available in their recovery process. Both Sisters were in a learning mode and attended every talk, workshop or symposium that dealt with human trafficking. In the course of this exploration, the need for housing frequently came up. After the call became so loud they could not turn a deaf ear to it, they began to consider starting a safe house. This subsequently shaped not only their response but their daily lives. By sharing a home with trafficked survivors the Sisters found themselves in a new learning mode. This step of the process brought a sharper focus. They consulted with others who ran safe houses to learn best practices and then give a structure to their own.

What became very apparent as plans were being made was the need to collaborate in this ministry. This is another of Jordan's values – to use all ways and means and involve others. The many facets of human trafficking, including the legal, the case management, and the physical/mental healing process, demand the skills of many different types of experts. Persons with these skills shared their advice, which helped the Sisters sort through the many considerations in setting up SDS Hope House, the name chosen for the house.

While the above steps on the journey predated the Salvatorian Family Charter, the Salvatorian values reflected in the Charter were already in the planning. A fire had been kindled and was being stoked. These experiences were animating the Sisters' energy for the mission.²⁴ They were in a listening and learning mode, listening to the Spirit blowing wherever.²⁵ They tapped the expertise and gifts of the people they encountered along the way and began building collaborative networks.²⁶ They reached beyond the Catholic circle of ministry since the house was located in a setting of a large number of evangelical believers. The Sisters experienced them as kindred spirits with their passion to save persons caught in the reality of modern day slavery.

So this ministry was developing a very ecumenical face. This came out of both necessity and need. The Sisters felt gifted by the expertise and wisdom of others who shared their experiences, as the Sisters laid the groundwork for their shelter.²⁷ The Salvatorian Family Charter's articulation of the dynamics they were experiencing was a confirmation for them as well as a blessing. These values became their "strategy and business plan".

Certainly the value of persistence, of overcoming the obstacles encountered in birthing a new ministry, mentioned more than once in the Salvatorian Family Charter, has been an anchor for this ministry. Crosses have never been sought out, but they were there along the way. Sometimes Divine Providence seemed to have things miraculously fall into place. Other times, the Sisters put forth all the ingenuity they had with no apparent results. The work of justice never comes easy and is not for the faint of heart. In looking at the end point of the earthly life of Jesus, in seeing how Father Jordan and Blessed Mary of the Apostles kept pressing for what they felt was their true calling, the Sisters had the grace to continue their own course. Part came from personal prayer - keeping a connection to the person of Jesus and the bigger picture. Part was mediated through the belief and encouragement of the broader Salvatorian Family. Their interest and support in various ways gave the Sisters hope to keep

²⁴ Charter of the Salvatorian Family (para 6) "Our personal and communal experience of salvation is the dynamic and animating energy for our mission."

²⁵ Ibid. (para 10) "Lived in the real world, our personal and communal spirituality is rooted in our experience of God the Father. Jesus Christ, who came to give life to all, is the Source and the Center of our spirituality. With Mary, His mother, we bear to others the Savior we have come to know ourselves. The Holy Spirit guides and enlightens us along the way."

²⁶ Ibid. (para 8b) "We involve others in our mission and seek to collaborate with those involved in promoting truth, justice and the defense of life, making a preferential option for the poor and for those whose humanity and dignity are not recognized."

²⁷ Ibid. (para 14) "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. We nurture trust and respect for the differences among us, learn from one another, and value the contribution that each is able to make for our life and mission."

on the journey. It was a journey towards “fullness of life” for the forty-four women from 13 countries and the United States with whom Sisters Jean and Sheila have shared life at SDS Hope House over eight years.

In 2007 the Salvatorian Priests and Brothers also promulgated a corporate stance at their Provincial Chapter. “The members of the Society of the Divine Savior will • take a corporate and public stance against the human trafficking of women, children and men; • pledge to do what we can with our structures and ministries to bring healing and justice to these victims; •join the many other communities of religious men and women who have already taken a public corporate stance on this important issue.”

In addition the Salvatorian Sisters established an Anti Human Trafficking Committee. As it evolved it became a collaborative effort with members of all three Salvatorian branches serving as members. The Committee has met every six weeks for fourteen years and has planned many means for educating the Salvatorian Family in the U.S. about what human trafficking entails and what Salvatorians can do to work against it at the local, national and international level.



Today Salvatorians form a larger, more complex band of Jordan’s followers. Our structures honor our varied lifestyles as valid, complementary, and of equal importance in the work of evangelization and justice promotion. As of October 2012 Salvatorians around the world claim a common Salvatorian Charter, which undergirds our shared vocation, impels us in our global mission “to continue Jesus’ life-giving work of bringing salvation to all creation, and liberation from all that is a threat to fullness of life.”²⁸

The diagram²⁹ below embodies the words of the Charter in a way that highlights values of greatest emphasis and importance. Clearly God is at the center of all that Salvatorians strive to express in life and ministry as modern apostles. The Salvatorian Charter offers insights that guide us as a diverse global Family in responding to the signs of the times NOW wherever God has placed us.

²⁸ Ibid. (para 5)

²⁹ The image is a ‘Wordle’ -- a way for generating “word clouds” from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. <http://www.wordle.net/>

3. The authors state that Salvatorians have a wonderful legacy of learning to read the signs of the times from a faith perspective. Identify some contemporary Salvatorians from whom you learned to read the signs of our time from a faith perspective. What are you learning and how is it influencing your life as a Salvatorian?
4. “Jordan was more of a *now* person than a *long range* planner.” How do you, or How does the Salvatorian Family in your area, balance the both/and in responding to the signs of immediate needs and those that call for future planning?