

# TOWARD A SALVATORIAN THEOLOGY OF SALVATION

1 January 2015

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## PROLOGUE

St. Augustine once wrote: “You stir [humans] to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>1</sup> This sentence contains a rich theology that applies generally to salvation. In broadest terms, what God created as separate and distinct from God’s Self is, according to God’s plan and will, destined to return to God and “rest in (God).” Salvation can apply to either:

- (1) the process by which God’s plan is enacted: “...as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth,”<sup>2</sup> (Eph 1, 10), or,
- (2) as the end product of that process, namely, life eternal in God.

Jesus, our Savior, and the Holy Spirit have revealed God’s plan of salvation and powerfully begun that saving process in human history. As they involve us in that process, we humans, capable of consciousness of God and God’s work among us and within us, are called not only to form “social, technical, and cultural bonds,” but also “to achieve full unity in Christ.”<sup>3</sup> (Lumen Gentium, I, 1) There, immersed in God’s Love, every tear will be wiped away (Is 25, 8), and we shall praise God endlessly (Rev 5, 13): God who will be “all in all.” (1 Cor 15, 28)

## TOWARD A SALVATORIAN THEOLOGY OF SALVATION

What, then, is a Salvatorian approach to the theology of salvation? Let us identify some key aspects. First, to be apostles in the world, we need to be in intimate, loving relationship with God ourselves, lest, trying to lead others, we are only the blind leading the blind. We often describe this intimate relationship as one of “knowing God.” Then, God calls us to collaborate with God, one another, and others in the process

**“With Mary, His mother, we bear to others the Savior we have come to know ourselves.”**  
**Charter #10**

of salvation. We seek not only our own salvation but that of all. We will not rest, not even for a moment, as long as there is one person who does not know and love God above all else.<sup>4</sup> (Charter, Preface, line 1) Knowing God and loving God are linchpins in our theology of salvation. We are called to be ministers of hope for a people who need direction, who need strength, who need an intimate, loving relationship with their saving God. We seek to “lead others to justice,” conscious that the causes of others’ pain are often due to external forces beyond their control. Often, it is the sin of others, or at least the ignorance of others, that causes much of their pain. We seek to bring others to freedom, whether their chains are spiritual, physical or mental, emotional, familial or social. Helping God to free them from their slavery to sin, whether in the spirit or in the flesh, whether long-held or only recently acquired, is part of our vocation. Ultimately, helping all people everywhere, to know God, love God, serve God, and come into eternal union with God, is our life work. The social dynamic, too, is our life work: all shall come to serve others as brothers and sisters in the Savior.

## KNOWING GOD

No theology of salvation for Salvatorians would be complete without considering the phrase “to know God.” A cursory look at the Rule of Life, Constitutions, and General Statutes of the Congregation of Sisters of the Divine Savior,<sup>5</sup> for example, yielded the following: The expressed hope that all might know God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent was found 4 times. This is a faithful repetition of Jn 17,3: “Now this is eternal life, that they should know

you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” The Constitutions also express the mission of making God, or Jesus, or “Him” known a further 9 times. Collectively, this constitutes a heavy emphasis on this one part of our Charism. Let’s take a look!

Constitutions, no. 4, is insightful: “Jesus, as Savior of the world, is the focus and source of our life. From him we learn to thirst for the Father’s glory, as our founders did. Our desire to be totally his and to cooperate in his work of salvation draws us to know him intimately and to love and serve him unreservedly.” Theologically, God, who first desires us, gifts us with a desire for him! God draws us into God’s very Being in an intimate way by inviting us to “know” him, and thence, to love and serve him. The more intimately we know God, the more fully we can love him. The more we love God, the more we seek to fulfill God’s will, by serving him and others wholeheartedly, obeying God’s commands, praising and glorifying God, etc.

Constitutions, no. 20, presumes knowing God, and takes knowledge and love to the next level: “...Endeavoring to be deeply sensitive to his [God’s] transforming Spirit, we are opened to God’s unfathomable love and are progressively freed to love all as Christ loves us. His presence in us radiates peace and joy and enables us to communicate his goodness and saving love to everyone he places along our path.” Here, we note that “knowing” God is not actually mentioned, but the fruits of such knowledge are! God’s Spirit works within the milieu of each person’s freedom to help one be more open, and freer to radiate outward the love that is known. One may say that the Congregation’s Constitution treats knowing God as a widely applicable process for apostolic maturity. Paraphrasing the psalmist, this maturing process resides where love and responsibility shall meet, contemplation and ministry shall kiss. (cf. Ps 85, 11)

A soliloquy on John 10 may prove helpful here. The johannine author is usually quite consistent in his use of major theme words. The johannine author actually uses several verbs for “to know,” and many scholars believe that these verbs are interchangeable. However, this author notes that not all uses are the same. John 17, 3 features the verb, “ginoskein,” which is the infinitive form of the verb that actually appears in that sentence. More often, in John, this refers to a personal knowing of another person than other verbs, which often connote: “to get the idea.” Perhaps the greatest use of “ginoskein” comes in John, Chapter 10: The Savior himself utters the following: “I am the good shepherd, and I know [my sheep] and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father...”

That is four uses of “ginoskein” in a single sentence! Moreover, it is theologically dense, for it relates our human knowing to God’s. There is a “likeness” between our human knowing and God’s!

Moreover, the shepherd’s knowing of his sheep will end in his giving his life for his sheep. (10, 11) Knowing and loving are essentially the same thing. And knowing his sheep is personal; he knows them each by name; he calls them, and they follow him. (10, 3-4) If the Savior’s “knowing” his sheep is loving to the point of death, personal (by name), and relational (they hear and follow his voice), then it is truly an intimate form of loving. This is the major lesson to learn from the johannine author.

## LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS

Our Salvatorian Family Charter reminds us of our vocation, working so that all peoples, everywhere, will “experience fullness of life through Jesus the Savior.”<sup>5</sup> (Charter, Sec. I,

**“Our universality  
...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**

call to help God *enact the process* of salvation. Yet we also care that all people may come to know God fully, love God fully, and give themselves over to God completely. This will be most fully realized in heaven, when, as written above, God will be all in all. In Augustine’s phrase, we will (fully and completely) “rest” in God’s very Being. It can be noted here that, in a certain sense, God’s very Being *IS* the end-point of the process of salvation. We come to live for God, live in God, and praise God’s all-holy Name forever. In John’s Gospel, in which Jesus and the Father are one, Jesus Christ, our Savior, will be the end-point of the process of salvation. He said, “...And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” (Jn 12, 32) We, the saved, shall all be incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ (1Cor 12, 12-27) and together form that Being who is Christ come to full stature. (Eph 4, 13)

## Reading the Interior Signs of the Times

We Salvatorians are called to “read the signs of the times,”<sup>6</sup> (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4) and act accordingly, so that our ministries may bear maximum fruit. A great many news stories around the world clamor for our attention. We can consume ourselves in listening to them to seek the signs of the times.

sometimes the more quietly held inside people’s these: Some people say: “I Jesus,” but seldom pray and Where is their love for the and life-giving Word of Some people secretly worry their unspoken hope is that enter heaven. They suffer relationship with God, who knowing and all-loving. exists, and trust that an all-them and let them into

judgment. Still others profess their faith scrupulously, and pray diligently, without quite knowing how to embrace God as their Friend.

**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 # 8a**

As meritorious as that is, important signs of the times are hearts and minds. Consider believe in God,” or “I believe in even less often come to church. Eucharist? For the nourishing God? For the Catholic Church? that they might go to hell, and they will pass the Judgment and from a very uncertain is all-just and all-merciful, all-Some Christians doubt that hell loving God will surely exonerate heaven with no process of

If these and other views occupy the hearts and minds of Christians, strong and weak, what occupies the hearts and minds of non-Christians? Some believe in Allah and his prophet, Mohammed, but regard Christ only with a sense of distant respect, if at all. Some believe in Buddha’s teachings, and some greatly respect and honor Buddha. Our Jewish brothers and sisters accept the entire Hebrew Scriptures, but not the Christian scriptures. The list of other, non-Christian beliefs is long and varied in the world! How do we approach them with the

Good News of Jesus Christ? How do we impart to them the saving message of the crucified one? These are among the “quieter” signs of the times, yet they directly touch our charism. At their center, each person, Christian, former Christian, and non-Christian, deserves our complete attention. Secretly, they may be asking us: What is salvation? and, Will I be saved? Or... they may not be asking those questions at all. In pure ignorance, they may have no idea of God, our loving Creator, of Jesus, the Savior, or of the dynamic Holy Spirit.

Father Francis Jordan and Mother Mary of the Apostles cared very deeply about what goes on inside people’s hearts and minds. As a disciple of Jesus, and feeling very much called by God to found a Society that would collaborate with God for the salvation of souls, Father Jordan founded a group of people: lay men and women, sisters, brothers and priests, to work together as a team and go forth into the world as apostles, animating all peoples to come to a deep and love-filled faith in Jesus Christ – the Son of God, and our Savior. These apostles would find where people were “on the inside” and work sensitively, encouragingly, positively, at times humorously, to correct misperceptions and replace them with God’s truth. God would lead them, if they were open to the Word, to new and clearer understandings of God, the afterlife, heaven, hell, God’s plan, God’s forgiveness, Christ’s Church, the sacraments as God’s helps - given to us out of love, etc.

We follow the inspiration and leadership of Father Jordan and of Mother Mary of the Apostles to proclaim that, despite all doubts to the contrary, and despite all fears, Jesus Christ is truly “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Jesus].” (Jn 14, 6) To be assured of fullness of life in eternity, Jesus himself is the path, the true Source of life, and God’s Life itself.

## **SALVATION: LEADING OTHERS INTO THE FREE, OPEN SPACES**

Salvation also has another model: that of leading people into freedom, into the open spaces. While this model was in vogue in the 1970’s, it still resonates. The model considers God’s saving act for the Jews enslaved in Egypt. Theirs was a life of misery and pain, “with hard work in mortar and brick and all kinds of field work – the whole cruel fate of slaves.” (Ex 1, 14) From their misery, God delivered them! God brought them out of the land of Egypt with prodigies, led by his servant Moses. We Salvatorians also are called to help lead people out of their dungeons and cellars, out of their shackles and chains. We are to deliver them from inward fears and outward harm and injury. We are to bind up their wounds, provide medical care, and give them refreshing water to drink. We are to wipe away their tears and give them something to smile about, God-willing. We are to ask our Savior to help us in delivering them into a Promised Land of peace and contentment, of joy and hope. This, too, is the abundant life that Jesus promised.

## **JESUS CHRIST: THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA**

Jesus Christ is life itself... and the fullness of life. If we Salvatorians are to have any theology of salvation at all, let it end with that thought. The Savior who leads our way, the Infant who took on our human flesh, the Youth, intelligent and asking great questions, the Preacher, the Baptist’s Friend, the Rabbi, the Healer, the Feeder of hungry multitudes, the Friend of outcasts, sinners, women, children, the ignored, the dispossessed, the poor, the anawim, the Suffering Servant, the Crucified One, the Risen Lord, the Master of the apostles, Mary’s Son... He is Divine Life. All we may say about salvation shall end in him. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. (cf. Rev 1, 8) Christ, our Life, come save us!

## 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. The author writes about interior signs of the times as questions that arise in the human heart. What are interior questions for you; for those whom you serve or with whom you minister? What response flowing from our Salvatorian charism *might* you give; *do* you give?

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, Confessions, Book I, i, 1; translated w/ Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1991, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> This and all Scripture passages are taken from: The Catholic Study Bible, Donald Senior, Genl. Ed.; Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1990; containing the New American Bible with Revised New Testament, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> This and all Vatican II Document passages are taken from: Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Austin Flannery, O.P., Genl. Ed.; Costello Publishing Co., Northport, New York, 1975. Here, p. 350.

<sup>4</sup> This and all passages from the Charter are taken from: Charter of the Salvatorian Family, October, 2012, pdf version, SDS Family Charter EN, copied from the website: <http://www.sds.org/about-us/salvatorian-family/charter>. Each section has been given a title (e.g. - Preface) or “Section” number, followed by a paragraph number.

<sup>5</sup> Rule of Life, Constitutions, and General Statutes of the Congregation of Sisters of the Divine Savior, with Promulgation and Introduction by Sister Sr. Irmtraud Forster, Genl. Superior, in Rome, Apr. 29, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Flannery, p. 905.