

FIRE THAT LIGHTS OTHER FIRES

JORDAN'S APOSTOLIC SPIRIT

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SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE SAVIOUR - SDS
Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians
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*“At least once a week
investigate whether the APOSTOLIC SPIRIT
pervades the Society everywhere;
if you find it lacking
then pray with all your might,
and full of holy
zeal introduce it everywhere...”*

Blessed Francis Jordan - SD I, 197

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A FLAMING TORCH

FIRE THAT LIGHTS OTHER FIRES

Jordan's apostolic spirit

1. Dear confreres, I send you cordial greetings in Jesus Christ, our Divine Saviour. I am writing this letter to you from the vast country of India, where I am visiting confreres living in the most populous country in the world. India, as we know, is a highly significant archetype of the Salvatorian mission. For it was in these distant lands that the missionary charism that burned in the heart of Blessed Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan was first put into practice. Already as a theology student he had a list of witnesses of great apostolic zeal who served as a source of inspiration for his vocational journey. He wanted to keep alive in his heart the burning and luminous fire of the prophet Elijah, of John the Baptist, of Paul of Tarsus, of Francis Xavier and so many others. Later, he took as his own these annotations of St. Gregory: *"He who does not burn, does not set others on fire."* (SD I,186), even the quotation from St. Chrysostom: *"A single man inflamed by the zeal of faith is sufficient to correct a whole people."* (SD I,200) and the motto of St. Ignatius: *"Go in the name of the Lord and inflame all"* (SD II,21).



Fr. Milton Zonta SDS
SUPERIOR GENERAL

2. In fact, those who knew Blessed Francis Jordan often refer to the image of FIRE to describe his spiritual life and his

passion for evangelisation. Others refer to his determination and longing for the Motherhouse to become “*a school to be apostles*”. There, the Founder used to enthuse the young people with these words, “*We are called to the apostolate; we are called to announce God’s word (...) How much an apostle accomplishes if he is permeated with love!*”¹ In addition, in the countless letters he wrote to the missionaries, he made recommendations of this kind: “*Be a true apostle to all those poor people...*”² “*May all of you be true apostles of Jesus Christ*”.³ This apostolic-missionary dimension is what he most wanted to revive in the Church. That is why the fire he lit spread throughout the world and continues to burn to this day. It is a new fire that has the dynamism of this Ignatian spiritual motto: “*a fire that kindles other fires*”. A fire that burns the heart, that transforms life and impels us to bring Jesus Christ to the different realities of our time, with courage, creativity and decisiveness.

3. However, I presume we all agree that sometimes our apostolic ardour (personal and communal), seems to collapse, to shrink or to become lukewarm. Where this happens, the Salvatorian vocation, as a consequence, loses its evangelising power, closes in on itself and becomes sick. In the hope that our apostolic service will become more and more an authentic life that spreads to others, I would like to offer you this reflection on the theme of *apostolic vocation* as an inalienable value of our mission in and with the Church. From among the various contents of the “ALLOCATIONS of the FOUNDER”, I have selected his

1 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 4 June 1897.

2 JORDAN, Francis. Letter to Fr. Felix Bucher, 13 September 1894.

3 JORDAN, Francis. Letter to the confreres of St. Nazianz, USA, 24 May 1899.

main **apostolic challenging questions**, so that they may help us to shape our thinking, feeling and living today.

4. These contents, grouped into 10 THEMES, point to the essentials of our Salvatorian life, that is to say, to the apostolic spirituality which is the oil that makes us live passionately for the Gospel and keeps the fire of our mission burning. In the process of writing this reflection, I was reminded of several dialogue meetings I had with groups of Salvatorian scholastics. These young people come from the most diverse cultures, visions, and ecclesial experiences, but all equally thirsty for coherence and apostolic authenticity. This also inspired me to write this letter, imagining three young Salvatorians (*Philip, James, and Matthew*), responding to and commenting on the **Founder's apostolic challenging questions**. I assure you that it is worthwhile to know what these young men and many others think, who wish to follow in the footsteps of Blessed Francis Jordan. However, what I want most of all is that every Salvatorian feels within himself this challenge to leave none of the “provocations of the Founder” unanswered, and to deepen the richness of his spirituality and the continuous invitation to “*walk in the footsteps of the holy apostles.*”⁴

4 JORDAN, Francis. Rule of 1882, chap. III, p. 23.



PEOPLE OF PRAYER



• “There is a particular point to which I would like to alert you again, something so necessary to the apostolate, to the fulfillment of your high task: prayer! Oh, don’t deceive yourselves! If you truly desire the mission and so want to become apostles, if you want to accomplish great things, then become men of prayer!⁵ Our times need men of prayer.

• And what good is all our work and struggle, all our preaching and writing, if God doesn’t help?⁶

• What Good will all the rest be (suffering, work, plans and intentions, converting people) if you are not holy?⁷

• Do you think St Francis Xavier would have accomplished so much if he had reduced his contemplation and prayers to the minimum?”⁸

5 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 5 January 1900.

6 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 15 July 1898.

7 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 20 April 1894.

8 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 2 December 1898.

5. How important it is for me to hear the Founder stress that prayer is vital for a Salvatorian. Even more, to make us understand that in our vocational journey there is no contradiction between action and prayer. Our apostolic action, however important it may be, without the mystical dimension, becomes mere activism or philanthropy. Of course, the Founder does not say so, but the way to become “people of prayer” is to be found mainly in the model of a prayerful life, which he and the Salvatorians from the very beginning taught us by their words and example. The prayer life of the first missionaries, although marked by a few hours or exercises of piety, was not reduced to a kind of pietism proper to their time. Thus, by the testimony we have received, we are encouraged to strengthen the spirituality of apostolic service - in the manner proposed by St. Ignatius - of praying always and everywhere. Such a spiritual life presupposes a way of uninterrupted prayer, of contemplation in action, of being totally united to Jesus Christ and completely inserted in the world with Him. In other words, apostolic action must be a reflection of what one carries within oneself.



JAMES

6. Listening to the words of our dear Founder, it came to my mind that in most of our Salvatorian houses the way of praying of the monastic tradition, that is, the recitation of the liturgy of the hours at some time during the day, still occupies a central place. Although I am young, I have already realised that this way of praying, when it is not accompanied by the prayerful reading of the Bible, can become very inadequate. What often happens is that the words are heard with the ears and



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the prayers are uttered with the lips, but the heart is completely absent. Whereas, if prayer reaches the heart, it purifies the heart, and thereby makes our experience of faith richer. By passing the Gospel to the heart, as my novitiate master used to say, it helps us to live the faith from within, transforming our criteria, attitudes and feelings, so that we identify with the words and gestures of Jesus, our Saviour.

***OH DON'T DECIEVE YOURSELVES!
IF YOU TRULY DESIRE THE MISSION
AND SO WANT TO BECOME APOSTLES,
IF YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS,
THEN BECOME MEN OF PRAYER!***

7. It is also clear to me that we can no longer be content with a one-hour daily prayer meeting with God. Of course, praying the liturgy of the hours is important and necessary, but God, our Father, does not live only in the chapel. That is why I am glad that the Founder encouraged us to “be men of the spirit”, capable of finding God in people’s lives, in our apostolic activity, in big and small events. I have met Salvatorians who begin the day with a moment of silence while reading and meditating on the readings of the day’s liturgy. Some of us even do this using digital media as a tool for our daily meditation. These new technologies are an indispensable resource of our time and we cannot be unaware of the great diversity of ways



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and preferences that nourish the spirit, that help to recover lost strength and renew us interiorly to undertake the task of evangelisation. In any case, if there is one thing we can be sure of, it is that without a deep spiritual life no apostolic service can be rendered.



ALWAYS WALK ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT



- *“It is especially important for us to implore the Holy Spirit to help us so that we, like the holy apostles, always remain unanimous, united in the Holy Spirit, one in heart.*
- *What shall we accomplish as apostolic men without the help of the Holy Spirit (...)?*
- *Without help from above how can we recognize these enemies or have the strength to resist them?*
- *What can we expect to accomplish if we are not united?*
- *What can a small army do against so many enemies, if its ranks are not solidly united?”⁹*

9 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 11 June 1897.

8. If we really want to be fair to our Founder and to understand his questions, we must remember that he was a child of his time. For example, he always recommended a unique model of community based on the observance of the rules. And as we know, countless Salvatorians have been formed in this way of perfection that has worked for a long time, a model of observance that has produced fruits of holiness and great examples of apostolic life. However, as we see in our times - moved by the renewal of the Second Vatican Council - the strength of apostolic community life lies not so much in the observance of rules or discipline, but is inspired and sustained by a life rooted in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the Founder stressed that we should learn to invoke the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit, often forgotten in our prayers, who is the source of true communion and who connects us to the teachings of the Gospel in every time and place. In other words, the driving force must come from the Holy Spirit who transforms people's lives, for there will never be mission without the help of the Holy Spirit.



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***WHAT SHALL WE ACCOMPLISH
AS APOSTOLIC MEN
WITHOUT THE HELP
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?***

9. I like to think that we come from different nations and from the most varied languages and cultures. This multiculturalism is undoubtedly a very significant richness of our identity as Salvatorians. However, it would be an illusion to think that our strengths are enough to achieve the unity we seek. The gift of unity, of which the Founder speaks, is a grace that only the Holy Spirit can bring us in order to make the Gospel message more credible. On the other hand, we cannot be incautious and underestimate the power of evil at work in our midst. It is so true that it sometimes hurts to see in our communities, as Pope Francis explained, that sometimes there are: “... *various forms of hatred, divisions, slander, defamation, revenge, jealousy, the desire to impose one’s own ideas at any cost, and even persecutions that seem like a relentless witch-hunt.*”¹⁰ If we do not recognise this power of evil of which the Founder speaks, we will be exposed to deception and mediocrity. The other day, someone in the community was talking about exactly that: to intensify our vigilance among ourselves and to fight the temptation of worldliness, invoking the help of the Spirit through a vigorous apostolic sense of praying and evangelising together.



10. I think one could summarise the Founder’s words as follows: we are called to “*work as apostolic men*” with the power of the Holy Spirit. For me, this is more than enough to lead me to think that we are not supermen, nor are we merely “co-workers”. First of all, we are “people of faith” who have heard the call to follow Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the main actor of the mission. It is He who guides us on the way to remain

¹⁰ FRANCIS. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 100

united in diversity and to carry out the apostolic mission in unity and complementarity. Furthermore, the Founder warns us against the temptation that often presents itself as a trap in apostolic life, that is, to think that the results depend only on our ability to do and to plan. Even more serious is this: if we are infected by the “virus of individualism”, we become totally isolated from others. It is with great sadness that I can say that I have experienced this anti-testimony of Salvatorians who act without communion, in competitive relationships and in an excessive search for personal success. That is why I am consoled that the Founder comes to remind us that mission is not the work of “individuals”. Mission is carried out in communion. And, therefore, that without “the light from on high” we will not achieve anything solid and lasting in the apostolic service to which we have been chosen. It is the Holy Spirit who gives fruitfulness to our apostolate!



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IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING



- “Please consider your vocation well, to what vocation have you been called, why you have come!
- Why did I come? For what purpose? To which Society? To what vocation? To accomplish what?
- What does it mean, to leave everything and follow Jesus?”¹¹
- Our main task is to imitate and follow our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world... If we name ourselves after the Divine Saviour, then we must also strive to follow the Saviour of the world. Oh, what more exalted name! Since Providence reserved it for us, should we not be striving to imitate the Saviour of the world?¹²

11 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 4 February 1898.

12 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 4 December 1899.

11. Very interesting this call of the Founder that we need to “*reflect and examine*” our vocation well. On the one hand, because the decision to embrace the vocation to the Salvatorian apostolic life is not an obvious path. On the other hand, it serves as a warning against the temptation to settle into a Salvatorian life without spiritual vitality. Salvatorian identity cannot be lived simply as if we were members of a club or something similar. Therefore, familiarity with Jesus in personal prayer and in the Eucharist is the primary condition for those of us who are called to Salvatorian apostolic life. Our life choice to leave everything and follow Christ requires continuous reflection, accompaniment and prayer. I often like to see in our homes the icon of the Divine Saviour, for it is He who inspires and guides all that we are and do and explains the content of our message. Blessed is the Salvatorian who knows how to live his belonging to the Society with joy and recognises in fraternal community life his identity, because he will become more and more a admirable person, capable of great spiritual fruitfulness.



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12. For me it is very important that we are formed with the awareness that we are a Society that has its own original way of apostolic mission. In such a way that it is impossible to live the Salvatorian vocation in a neutral or uncommitted way, but from the identity of persons consecrated to the apostolate. In the theology of religious life, this form is explained on the basis of three intimately united and integrated elements. These elements are: spiritual life (mysticism), fraternal life (community) and the



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life of service to others (apostolate).¹³ These three elements are the key to carrying out this mission of being missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, making him known to all peoples and in all places. I am convinced that without bearing in mind these elements that define our apostolic style, however efficient our works may be, they will remain administrative actions based on a criterion of self-preservation. On this subject, it is worth reminding ourselves of the Founder's advice, which Father Pancratius Pfeiffer used to mention: *"You can organise all you want, but if the people do not have the spirit, all will be in vain"*.¹⁴

**PLEASE CONSIDER
YOUR VOCATION WELL,
TO WHAT VOCATION
HAVE YOU BEEN CALLED,
WHY YOU HAVE COME!**

13. I don't know what you think about the aspect of the apostolic orientation we received from the Founder. But, for me, at no time has he ever told us **WHAT** we should do, but rather he focuses on **HOW** we should live the particularity of our apostolic vocation in different contexts and places. Therefore, discernment about the apostolic means to be employed by us Salvatorians - so our novice master used to say - is an indispensable and obligatory



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13 Apostolic Religious Life finds its original inspiration in this fragment of the Gospel: *"...He called to him those whom he wanted. They came to him, (...) were with him, and to send them out to preach..."* (Mk 3:13 - 14).

14 PFEIFFER, Pancratius. Exchange of Ideas, p. 336.

task. That is to say: we are continually urged to examine the real identity of Salvatorian works, to see if they are in conformity with the apostolic vision of the Founder. Nowhere should the name “**Salvatorian**” represent a mere title; how fortunate it would be if our works bearing the name “**Divine Saviour**” had as their primary purpose to help people to KNOW the one God the Father, revealed in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ! It is true that times change and continue to change, but this will always be an essential and unavoidable element of our vocation and of every Salvatorian apostolic action.



THE POWER OF TESTIMONY



- *“Our vocation is to strive that all come to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent! (...) And, as I have often said already: it is most of all necessary to preach first by example, then with words.*
- *The pastor of some church, how can he set his people on fire if he does not preach by example?*
- *If the example contradicts the words, how can you accomplish anything?”¹⁵*
- *“Furthermore, how should you be salt of the earth and light of the world and drive the spirit of the world out of other people, if you yourself have failed to do this?”¹⁶*

15 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 11 March 1898.

16 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 22 March 1901.

14. Countless times I have read passages of the Founder explaining the Salvatorian apostolic methodology with these words: *“first of all by example and then by words”*. At the same time we all know in the history of the Church a long list of men and women of God who have taken seriously this way of evangelising with their own lives. In our Society there are such “sign-people” who have pointed out and continue to point out the apostolic holiness of the Founder. I am speaking of those Salvatorians who have made the Divine Saviour known, not in theory, but by the exemplary witness of their own lives. Moreover, when describing the life of the Founder, this key to the credibility of his actions, always marked by humility, simplicity, closeness and coherence, is very often mentioned. How can we not take this teaching into account today, when we live immersed in the culture of images? In today’s times, much more than by words, our apostolate needs to make the message of the Gospel come alive. There is no better way, if we want to bear fruit as the apostles did.



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**(...) AND, AS I HAVE OFTEN SAID ALREADY:
IT IS MOST OF ALL NECESSARY
TO PREACH FIRST BY EXAMPLE,
THEN WITH WORDS.**

15. When we read our Founder carefully it is not difficult to understand that the apostolate is not just a set of tasks without any connection to the life of the one who evangelises. To tell the truth, much more than knowing about the techniques used

or the results of our works, people prefer to listen to witnesses. People, said Pope Francis, “*thirst for authenticity (...) They demand that evangelisers speak to them of a God whom they know and treat familiarly as if they were seeing him*”.¹⁷ All this leads me to think how beautiful is the silent witness of our way of praying, of living together as brothers in community and of a profound availability to people’s needs. People expect to see and find in us people who speak of Jesus Christ through the authenticity of example, words and gestures: Salvatorians recognised, not by the quantity of works carried out, but by the quality of their vocation and the solidity of their commitment to the charism of Blessed Francis Jordan.



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16. In an interview, Pope Francis has indicated what he expects from religious: “*Let them bear witness to a different way of doing, of acting, of living! That it is possible to live in a different way in this world...*”.¹⁸ No matter how sublime our apostolic intentions may be, there is always the risk of settling into mediocrity, into a comfortable life and an apostolic routine. Without witness, we can't do anything in mission, the Founder points out. In fact, how do we want to transmit the Gospel, without fighting the “spirit of the world”, which enters everywhere, even into our Society? The Founder suggests that we meditate on the Gospel images of salt and light, because without the salt of the apostolic mission we are insipid and decay



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17 FRANCIS. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 150.

18 SPADARO, Antonio, “*Wake up the world!*” *Colloquy of Pope Francis with the Superior General*, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica*, p. 165 (2014/I), 5.

without spiritual impetus. That is to say, we will be Salvatorians without ardor in prayer, without enthusiasm for the mission, without passion for the charism we have received. Example and proclamation always go together, my spiritual director used to say, for they are like two necessary and complementary lungs that help to fill our mission as apostles in the world with oxygen.



CONTINUOUS TRAINING FOR MISSION



- *“Oh I ask you, I beg and implore you (...) always to strive for perfection until your last breath. Not to progress is to regress! Let each one examine himself, whether he is making progress or not.*
- *And what if you begin to fall away in that search (for perfection)?*
- *What right have you not to make progress? (...) Always advance in perfection, therefore, right until death!”*¹⁹

19 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 15 April 1898.

17. Listening to these questions, I realise that the question of ongoing formation is not simply a fashionable topic. On the contrary: this call to grow and to respond to the gift of the vocation we have received is always relevant. It is always a mistake to think that, once we have finished our initial formation and academic studies, we have everything we need to face the challenges of our consecration and apostolic service. Unfortunately, I have met some Salvatorians who are like that. They pretend to know everything, but without ever returning to the contents of the charism. However, the consequences of this attitude of not continually updating their formation are well known, that is, life progressively moves away from the ideal and the sense of belonging, with attitudes of apathy, routine and boredom. Formation in order to evangelise “*from the novitiate to the last breath*”, the Founder would tell us today. For him, formation was not restricted to a period of life, but was in itself permanent. In this sense, it is very true to say that formation is like breathing and that not to be continually formed means: to become deformed.



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18. I was thinking about these words: “*let each one examine himself*”. How often do we forget that we are primarily interested in and responsible for our own formation? The Founder’s plea is, let us not waste the circumstances of ordinary life, and of course also the extraordinary ones, as opportunities for formation. Moreover, it is worth remembering that ongoing formation does not consist of occasional interventions, such as taking courses in theology and/or dealing with themes of Salvatorian spirituality. Surely, the Founder would agree very much with



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what we call today “a culture of ongoing formation”. For, if we want to live our vocation truly and seriously, it is necessary, at the various stages of our existence, to allow ourselves to be challenged by God and to allow ourselves to be shaped by Him. And there are so many occasions for this, starting from our personal experiences, in our activities and responsibilities in the community, in the daily liturgy and even in our apostolic labours!

**OH I ASK YOU,
I BEG AND IMPLORE YOU (...)
AND WHAT IF YOU BEGIN TO FALL AWAY
IN THAT SEARCH FOR PERFECTION?**

19. I had never thought that, when we neglect or fail to invest in our education, it does not only mean that we have missed opportunities for growth. What’s more, I never thought that it could do us great harm in our lives. But it seems that the Founder did not think like that, but that for him, the absence of formation inevitably leads us backwards in our spiritual life and apostolate. By mentioning this classic saying: *“not progressing means going backwards”*, he is reiterating his thought that, not growing in our vocation, does not mean, in fact, that we stand still, but that we go backwards. From this, we come to the conclusion that Salvatorian formation is something dynamic, alive, in continuous progress. Without this perspective, we will remain stuck in the apostolate



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of “it has always been done this way”, and this will not allow us to grow. In short, if our apostolic life is not lifelong learning, “*life will be a continuous frustration*”, as Professor Cencini puts it.²⁰ There is no in-between!

20 CENCINI, Amedeo, Do we really believe in Lifelong Learning?, Sal Terrae, 2013, p. 9.



TIRELESS APOSTOLIC ZEAL



- *“We are called to work for the salvation of souls. But how can we who are called to accomplish this if we have no zeal?”*
- *And how should we develop zeal for souls in ourselves?*
- *Study your whole life! You must also be “fire”, and if you are not salt of the earth, neither will you be “light of the world.” (...) What good is salt of the earth for, if it loses its flavour?*
- *And what is the religious, especially the priest, if he is no longer the salt of the earth, no longer the light of the world?”* ²¹

21 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 29 April 1898.

20. It is very inspiring to think of our Founder as a person imbued with great apostolic zeal. For this is one of the characteristics that best describes his personality. What is said about him is not at all like a desk clerk who denotes monotony or lack of commitment. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In his experience of faith, the sublimity of his knowledge of Jesus Christ has made him an apostolic fire with an unceasing desire to “save everyone” and to reach everywhere. His life story makes us see that the Gospel command “*Go and make disciples of all nations*” (Mt 28:19) is not exhausted, and continues to commit us all to be missionary apostles of Jesus Christ. He invites us to be people totally at the service of others, like fire that does not heat for itself, like salt that does not give taste to itself or like light that does not illuminate itself. What the Founder is alluding to is clear: let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of this essential core of putting intensity and apostolic passion into our lives, because as he himself said: “*Whoever does not yearn does not burn.*”²²



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**WE ARE CALLED TO WORK
FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS.
BUT HOW CAN WE
WHO ARE CALLED TO ACCOMPLISH THIS
IF WE HAVE NO ZEAL?**

21. I was thinking about this digital and globalised environment we live in today. In such a context it has become quite normal to

22 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 6 May 1898.

talk about different ways of thinking about and carrying out the apostolic mission. However, more important than the means used is to have the missionary-apostolic spirit of the Founder up to date and permanent. That is to say, the missionary enthusiasm that is unleashed in the heart of every person who has encountered Jesus Christ. I have met many Salvatorians whose chronological age in no way diminishes their apostolic enthusiasm. However, I have also met others who suffer from a kind of “ageing” that can come at any time of life. Specifically: it is disenchantment and resignation that dominates and traps everything. When this happens, instead of a passion for the apostolic-mission, what we see is the development of a mediocre life without aspirations. This is not the apostolic attitude of which the Founder speaks. He invites us to keep our eyes open for human situations that call for a Salvatorian presence, as well as attention to geographical contexts that need our proximity, welcome and apostolic service.



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22. This invitation of the Founder: “*Study all your lives!*” I am delighted that the Founder underlined the need to study theology as the foundation of the apostolate. Indeed, without a solid formation in faith and charism, the apostolate becomes simply a planning or self-referential activity. So again we are urged to present the contents of the faith in a convincing way and with the best resources at our disposal. However, we must be careful that the “study for life” does not become purely a cultivation of the intellectual dimension as a kind of narcissism, which consists in living for oneself. Theological-



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pastoral updating is a tool that helps to avoid falling into superficiality. Moreover, its aim cannot be other than to place Jesus Christ at the centre of our life, as the reference point of the mission of evangelisation, in the face of the challenges of humanity and of the Church in our times.



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY



- *“Let us imagine this summons being aimed at each and every one of us: Give an account of your stewardship (...) Everywhere you have duties.*
- *Review them and think: can I calmly give an account of these things? (...) And the more duties, the more one wonders: can I render an account?*
- *Did I use the time, or did I do the good that was required of me?*
- *How did you administer your office today, you post? How have you used your talents, your time, your resources? In a Word, everything which God has given you?”* ²³

23 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 11 November 1898.

23. Time and again, repeatedly, strongly and categorically, the Founder has emphasised that the resources of the Society are instruments for fulfilling its apostolic purpose.²⁴ In the novitiate we learn that we must all be accountable for the good use of resources in the exercise of our apostolic mission.



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Yet, how many opportunities are wasted when we fail to discern the use of goods! It is worth reminding ourselves that we are not the owners of everything we have, but stewards of the little or the much that the community has at its disposal. It may even seem strange, but, in general, for us younger people, this aspect of the use of goods becomes very important. To prove it, it is enough to observe that in places where there is testimony of authenticity and transparency, these elements are decisive when choosing Salvatorian life or not. In short: however lofty our apostolic purposes may be, they are of little help if they do not make our coherence of life transparent and do not transmit our willingness to share who we are and the resources we have at our disposal.

24. If we listen with due attention to the Founder's words we can even glimpse the question of "spiritual laziness". I suppose this is what he means when he asks each of us to continually ask ourselves: *Have I used my time well? Have I done the good that I could have done?* According to Pope Francis, spiritual lukewarmness is the attitude that lodges in the heart and paralyses apostolic zeal.²⁵ It is a disease that leads us to live in mediocrity, discouragement and, finally, to a loss of sense of



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24 Cf. JORDAN, Francis. Rule of 1884.

25 Cf. FRANCIS. Homily Santa Marta Chapel, Rome, 1 April 2014.

commitment. In this sense, the Founder's challenging questions come to shake up our false justifications of a very comfortable apostolate and liturgies far removed from life. However, it is important not to forget that one does not fall into spiritual laziness from one day to the next. The lukewarmness begins little by little when we no longer manage to find time for prayer or even for reading and study. For those who live distractedly, spending their time in trivial activities, the medicine indicated by the Founder consists in not delaying to rekindle "*the fire of first love*" (Revelation 2,4), which is not possible without prayer, without the grace of God.

**AND THE MORE DUTIES,
THE MORE ONE WONDERS:
CAN I RENDER AN ACCOUNT?**

25. I'm not sure if I'm interpreting this correctly, but the Founder seems to be telling us that not all ways of administering goods are valid in our Society. How sad it is when goods are acquired and used as private property, without any link to the mission of the Society! Hence the call for discernment, transparency and accountability. The management of goods (spiritual and material) needs continuous vigilance, solidarity and evangelical coherence. I also believe that the Founder would agree that no Salvatorian Unit or work can claim the goods at its disposal as private and exclusive property. There is nothing against making investments or changes in property, but it should always be with the apostolic mission of making known, loving



JAMES

and following Jesus the Saviour, the beloved Son of God the Father, above all else. This was always the Founder's constant concern about the proper way to account for the administration of the Society's goods. All that we have and all that we receive must be at the service of the apostolate and never be devoted to the self-preservation of ourselves.



LIVING IN AN EASTER WAY



- *“Sufferings are the central factor in the life of an apostle.*
- *Still we have the task of becomming like the apostles. Therefore, we must above all else cling to the cross and be ready to drink the cup. And how should we drink it? ...*
- *Where, why, how will we receive it? (...)*
- *But how will we receive this cross (...)?*
- *If you desire to be apostles you must always be ready (...) to drink the cup of sufferings”.*²⁶

26 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 5 May 1899.

26. The Founder has repeatedly pointed out that cross-bearing is a key point in the life of the Salvatorian apostle. He not only spoke of the cross, but inserted the word “CROSS” into his name, a “name” to which he linked his experience of sacrifice and of a life given for others in the style of Jesus. Moreover, the cross became for him the suffering accepted as a natural consequence of a decision to live the Gospel as it was, convinced that *“the works of God prosper only in the shadow of the cross”* (SD I, 163). As the years go by, we all learn that there are sufferings and renunciations that are necessary if our life is to be fruitful and creative. Indeed, this is the oft-stated approach of *“always being prepared to drink the cup of sufferings”*. Not as an exercise in masochism or in seeking sacrifices. On the contrary, what the Founder proposes is to see and love the world as Jesus did, carrying within us the desire to respond to his call with sincerity, with consistency and with depth.



PHILIP

***IF YOU DESIRE TO BE APOSTLES
YOU MUST ALWAYS BE READY (...)
TO DRINK THE CUP OF SUFFERINGS.***

27. This is surely a key point of our spirituality, that is to say, the call that asks us for total availability and *“the duty to become like the apostles”*. It is, then, about following Jesus Christ carried to the ultimate consequences and, of course, away from a danger very well explained by Pope Francis.²⁷ He spoke of the temptation

27 FRANCIS. Homily in Santa Marta Chapel, Vatican, 14 September 2017.

to follow “*Christ without a cross*”, that is, to turn him into a mere spiritual master who offers spiritual advice and helps to cope with suffering. On the other hand, - so the Pope said - there is the reverse danger of presenting “*the cross without Christ*” as a kind of spiritual masochism. On this particular point, I would like to mention the Founder’s emblematic gesture of placing a crucifix in the hands of the first Salvatorians, asking them to persevere in their apostolic vocation and to preach Christ Crucified. There are admirable stories of the path travelled by these missionaries who have embraced the cross through a life full of patience and hidden dedication, like a seed fallen on the ground, which dies and bears fruit in abundance.



28. This image of “*drinking from the cup that the apostles drank*” makes me think exactly of the trials and sufferings that are part of the mission to evangelise. For, as I have already mentioned, it is not about seeking suffering as chronic victims do. Rather, it is that our decision to follow Jesus entails a willingness to be abandoned or even rejected. I believe this is what the Founder is talking about. The Salvatorian vocation offers no guarantee of success, of distinction or privilege. Quite the contrary: it accepts abandonment, rejection and hostility from those who are not interested in any change. In this regard, it is worth noting how the Founder, using simple language, explained to his missionary confreres to go against the current and to resist the tribulations and storms encountered along the way. As in the past, so today we are called to give proof of the authenticity of our vocation and of our relationship with



the Divine Saviour. This does not automatically mean suffering. Rather, it means accepting that the cross will come to us if we follow Jesus in the footsteps of the apostles.



HUMILITY IS THE POWER THAT EVANGELISES



- *“The higher the building is to rise, the deeper the foundation must be dug! The more we want to work for the salvation of souls, the deeper must be our humility.*
- *How can we count on God, if we don't possess humility (...)Look at how the saints called themselves the greatest sinners.*
- *But what will drive us to practice such humility, to descend into our lowliness?*
- *Why should we not feel the urge to humble ourselves?”* ²⁸

28 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 9 June 1899.

29. What strikes me most is the repeated use of the word humility in the gestures and writings of Blessed Francis Mary of the Cross. For me this is a clear sign of his great desire that humility should become the most outstanding virtue of all those who seek to live his apostolic charism. Just as a building cannot stand without deep foundations, so we cannot evangelise without attitudes that indicate that we are people in need of God and others. Whom do we want to evangelise without stripping ourselves of the false images we do not make, comparing ourselves with the majority of people who do not follow our choice of life? How often we are trapped by the hidden desire of those who seek the top positions, prestige and honours! Therefore, let us listen more to the Founder who asks us to underline the virtue of humility as a fundamental condition of our spiritual life, of apostolate and of salvatorian holiness. This also helps us to think, for example, of those places where there is a crisis, because of the decrease in vocations and the reduction of works. Perhaps, in these places, the time has come to act in other ways and with other means. In other words, from our own fragility and with few resources, as humble witnesses of the Gospel we are called to the service of others.



JAMES

30. In almost all areas of life we tend to put ourselves above others, and we all do it almost unconsciously. How can we deactivate that voice which makes us competitive with one another? I believe that the Founder wants to lead us well away from this way of thinking. According to him, humility is that strength which places us in God's perspective. Without becoming small and humble, we cannot know



MATTHEW

the living God, nor will there be harmony in our apostolic community. This is why it is all the more important to remember that, in the spiritual life, humility does not mean diminishing or hiding our capacities. What the Founder himself points out is a way of freeing ourselves from self-sufficiency, recognising our own human condition of littleness (humus). From this point of view, humility becomes our greatest shield against all forms of pride and, at the same time, the foundation which prepares us to carry out our mission in its proper measure.

***THE MORE WE WANT TO WORK
FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS,
THE DEEPER MUST BE
OUR HUMILITY.***

31. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the temptation of triumphalism is very present in our apostolic mission. Even among us Salvatorians there is this danger of allowing ourselves to be carried away by the spirit of conquest and the splendour of great numbers. The Founder's challenging questions, on the other hand, invite us to look for the "littleness" of the men and women who became saints. By littleness, I do not mean that these people were insignificant or less effective. On the contrary, these people have walked the path of a hidden life and an apostolate without making noise, but with a power capable of transforming hearts and the world. What



PHILIP

the Founder exhorts us to do is precisely this effective way of carrying out our mission, along this path of humility and littleness, in the most diverse places and contexts in which we find ourselves. Moreover, to observe that this key to his spiritual life, of building the apostolate in littleness and abasement, embraces a central dimension of the content of the revelation of God which is fulfilled in the littleness and the discarded of the world, that is to say, God comes down, reveals himself and saves.



POVERTY AS A PRECIOUS PEARL



- *“Let’s not forget the importance of holy poverty (...) this is the foundation and it should be the basis of the Society. (...) Hold quite firmly to poverty.*
- *Don’t underestimate this pearl of great price! Be assured that the Society will flourish or will fall with poverty. (...)*
- *And how can one who doesn’t observe poverty have joy in religious life?*
- *If we want to follow the Divine Saviour (...), if we want to become saints, if we want to convert the world, then let us become poor.”*²⁹

29 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 7 July 1899.

32. I think the first thing to mention is that, like other religious, our Founder chose for himself the name of the saintly “Poverello of Assisi.” He had this deep desire to follow Christ in the style of St. Francis of Assisi and to imitate intensely his virtues of living “holy poverty.” However, it is important from the outset not to confuse the poverty which the Founder wanted for himself and for the Salvatorians, as a synonym for “extreme poverty or misery” which dehumanises and has no evangelical value. The Founder, in turn, alludes to the evangelical dimension of poverty that brings us closer to God and puts us in communion with Him. It is poverty, freely chosen, in order to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, through a lifestyle inspired by self-denial, austerity, simplicity and hospitality. Without the witness of evangelical poverty, the Society is neither credible nor sustainable. I presume that this is what the Founder meant when he declared: *“with poverty the Society will flourish or fall!”* In this he was right, because in fact the most flourishing periods, as well as the moments of most intense crisis in religious life, have often been associated with the omission or the living of evangelical poverty.



MATTHEW

***IF WE WANT TO FOLLOW
THE DIVINE SAVIOUR (...),
IF WE WANT TO BECOME SAINTS,
IF WE WANT TO CONVERT THE WORLD,
THEN LET US BECOME POOR.***

33. It may even be very subtle, but at the root of our desire to live evangelical poverty, according to the Founder, it is about the gratitude for the love of God. It is a notion of poverty in which God appears as the only one who is necessary, which, in turn, frees our hearts from all desire for selfish possession and self-sufficiency. Without this vision of faith, any and every exercise of poverty can be anything but an evangelical virtue. Moreover, a sense of fidelity and commitment to evangelical poverty serves in abundance as well as in scarcity of material goods. This is because no one is exempt from being trapped by the worldliness of affluence that corrupts the apostolic mission. Moreover, in the face of the traps of consumerism, the best remedy is to continually educate ourselves to live a sober lifestyle and to return unceasingly to evangelical simplicity. Simplicity and sobriety, my spiritual director used to say, is an interior response, which only if lived with authenticity and deep conviction, creates a new way of relating to God, to others and to things. Today, more than ever, the mission of the Church needs Salvatorians like this, coherent with what they believe and live.



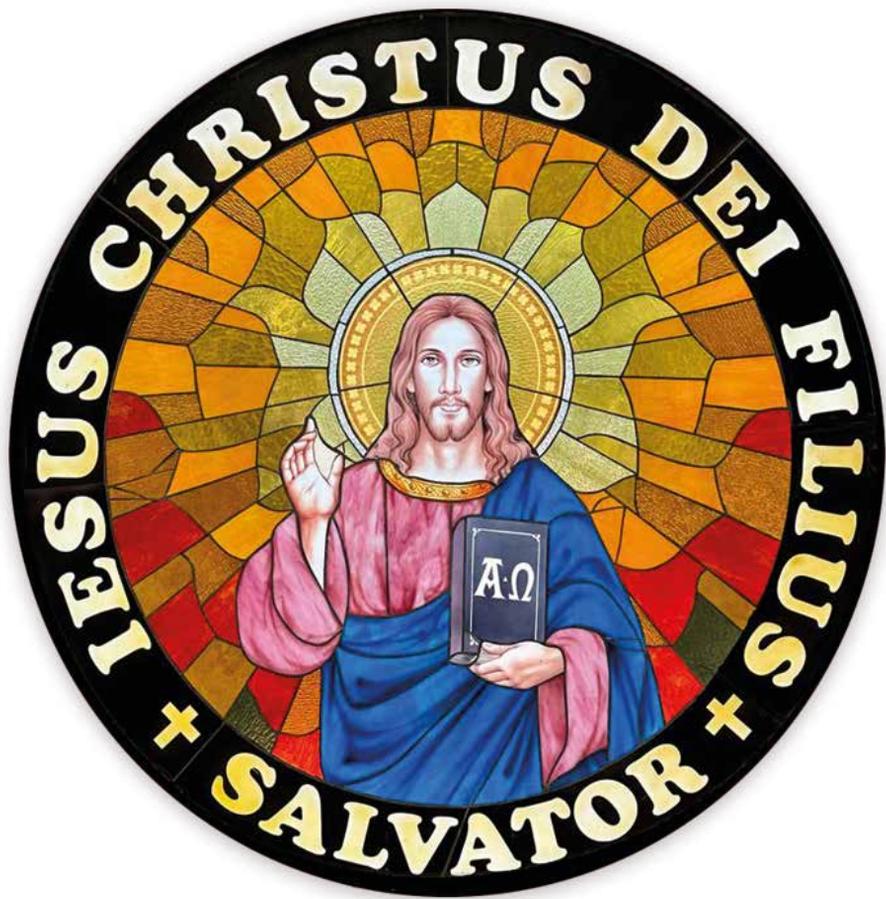
PHILIP

34. I would like to take up exactly this connection between evangelical poverty and missionary apostolic life. Expressed in other words, the Founder seems to be telling us that it is only by stripping ourselves totally that we can give ourselves entirely, giving the best of our time, our abilities, our resources and even our lives to make Jesus Christ known. However, it is important to remember that the witness of coherence and sobriety



JAMES

in the management of material goods must also be visible in our works and assets. The personal witness of poverty is obscured if the splendour of the technical resources and material riches at our disposal do not correspond to the message we proclaim. From this it becomes clear how important it is to heed the Founder's warnings not to let ourselves be carried away by the consumer culture in relation to material things. I suppose that, in today's day and age, he would point, for example, to the inordinate attention we attach to our vehicles, to electronic media and/or to money that is not shared and disappears in one's pocket. The same goes for the supposed security that we attribute to great works and the protection built by high walls, etc.... Of course, like all important things in life, there is a call here for ALL to return to the fundamentals of the Apostolic Society of yesterday and always.



STAINED GLASS WINDOW IN THE FORMATION HOUSE
IN CHULLIKKARA (INDIA)



CONCLUSION

35. Dear Brothers, just like the ember of a fire that over time is covered with ashes and buried under them, our Founder was concerned that the **apostolic spirit** in the Society should not be extinguished. So through the voice of the young men (Philip, Matthew and James) I wanted to “blow the fire” of what I consider essential in our Society, that is, that the enthusiasm and intensity of apostolic zeal that burned in the heart of Blessed Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan should not diminish or disappear from us. I venture to repeat here his concern that we examine whether, in all areas of our communities, the apostolic spirit prevails (cf. SD I, 197). May each of us succeed in putting intensity into all that we do, all that we are and all that we say. May the themes outlined here by our Spiritual Father help us in our initial and ongoing formation programmes. Moreover, it is my wish that we can also do this together with the Salvatorians of the other branches of the Salvatorian Family. How important

it is to dialogue and study the most essential aspects of our Salvatorian apostolic life! Whether it is to share the fruits of the charism today, or to talk about the difficulties of living the spirit of the Founder in the reality in which we find ourselves.

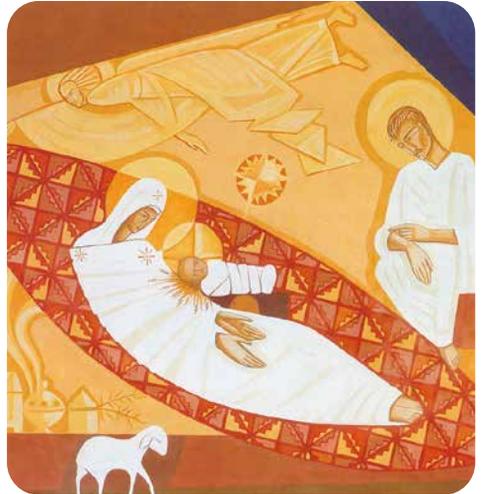
36. Let us not stand idly by and let us not be carried away by the current of problems. Let us set out on our journey, carried by the power of the Holy Spirit who accompanied the apostles. May this same Spirit enlighten our discernment to respond well to the **challenging questions of the Founder** and enliven our desire: to be *people of prayerful life, to walk always according to the Spirit, with identity and a sense of belonging, with the strength of witness, forming ourselves continually for the mission, with untiring apostolic zeal, with transparency in the management of goods, accepting with love the cross of discipleship, with an attitude of humility and evangelical poverty*. May we Salvatorians of the most diverse generations everywhere feel that we are marked by the fire of the **“Jordan’s apostolic spirit”**, with the conviction that: *“one cannot persevere in a fervent evangelisation if one does not remain convinced, by one’s own experience, that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to know Him, it is not the same thing to walk with Him as to grope with Him, it is not the same thing to be able to listen to Him as to ignore His Word (...) And a person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, sure, in love, convinces no one”*.³⁰

37. Finally, as we approach the celebration of Christmas, I would like to invite you to live intensely these days in which we celebrate **our Salvatorian feast par excellence**. *“A sweet feast,”* said the

30 FRANCIS. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 266

Founder, in which we are called “to explore and to renew our vocation, the lofty vocation to which God calls us”.³¹ We who are distinguished by the name of the **Divine Saviour** are invited, more than anyone else, to have the experience of feeling and tasting the salvation that God offers us in the humanity of his Son Jesus. May we Salvatorians, then, be the first to bring this LIGHT that dispels the darkness; mercy and forgiveness in the midst of violence; justice and equity in the midst of the exclusion of so many brothers and sisters; welcome and hospitality in the midst of a world that excludes and forcibly expels so many people from the territories they inhabit.

38. In places and contexts where, for pastoral reasons, it is impossible to celebrate the feast of the Nativity of the Saviour in community, I once again invite you to celebrate this principal feast of our Society on a day that is appropriate for the participation of ALL in the community. However, on the **Holy Night of Christmas**, do not forget to stop before a crib and pray for one another, especially for the missionaries and for our older confreres. Together let us ask through the intercession of Blessed Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan to help us to live the

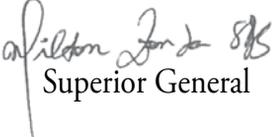


CLAUDIO PASTRO - SAGRADA FAMILIA CATHEDRAL,
SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL (1997)

31 JORDAN, Francis. Chapter Talk, 22 December 1899.

Feast of Christmas with the depth and joy of having been called to follow the Divine Saviour and to bear the beautiful name of **Salvatorians**.

39. On behalf of the members of the General Council, the secretaries and other collaborators, my best wishes to all of you for a **happy and blessed Christmas of the Saviour and a prosperous 2024!**


Superior General

A FLAMING TORCH

Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan

Lord Jesus Christ,
Oh, Sun of Justice,
shine and enlighten my soul
so its footsteps
may be like the morning light
that walks and lengthens
to perfect day. (SD I, 54)

Oh Saviour of all! (SD II, 9)
...I could always burn ardently
for love of You
and inflame everyone.
May I be a burning fire,
a flaming torch! (SD III, 20)

Lord Jesus Christ,
accept my life
and all I have
(...) here I am, send me! (SD I, 146)
show me the way
to lead all to You,
and with the help of Your grace,
to save them. (SD IV, 32)

Oh Saviour of the world!
Oh Saviour of all! (SD II, 9)
Be a Saviour to us! (SD I, 210)

Amen.





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