

# **Towards a Salvatorian Theology of Salvation in the African Perspective**

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## **Introduction**

The world of today seems to be in trouble. Peace seems to have evaporated; and a cluster of national and international tension-provoking incidents, together with the masters of suspicion who roam the vestibules of power and influence – not to mention the everyday common sense of the masses – all seem to converge on the significance of the terrorist attack in New York known as “9/11” as an event that no one dare to forget. The world lives with the fear that the forces of terrorism can hit and harm in any place and at any time. Terrorists hit Paris recently by killing journalists; and very recently in Kenya terrorists massacred 150 students who were all innocent. The aim of the killers is to destroy life. No one knows who or what will be the next target. Life itself is a target to be threatened, endangered, despoiled, and destroyed. In a word, we live in a global atmosphere where life is totally devalued and desacralized.

Looking at all these challenges which seem to put our world on its knees, sink our world into a pool of blood, immerse our world in a fire that does not want to go out, one has to ask himself / herself, why is this happening? What is really our final destination?

Whatever the answer may be, we can be certain that our differences, which ought to be a source of mutual enrichment, have become a threat to our togetherness. The mindset that seems to be prevailing more and more is not, “Let diversity invigorate your love for your sister, your love for your brother. Rather the byword seems to be, “Diversity suffocates.” You do not have a right to live

unless you become “me”, unless you become my race, my culture, my gender, my ideology and my religion.

In the face of all these challenges what is one to do? From my perspective we are on solid footing if we give our full attention to our families. The family seems no longer to be an oasis of togetherness, an occasion for “being with”. Instead the family seems to have become a swamp of selfishness and a bed of weeds for nourishing egocentric desires. We have to find out new ways to reach our families and accompany them on the path to salvation.

Where are we as *Salvatorians* within this world of ours, a world that is becoming a jungle fraught with disaster and chaos? What is our stand vis-à-vis the threats and suspicions that infect the human family’s capacity to love and trust? We are called to remove the screen from our small, enclosed world, our so-called comfort zone, and go to the oft-forgotten peripheries of our world – to those without a voice and without a face – and thus accompany them in their discovery of the true life in Jesus Christ, who dwells within the interior of their milieu.

Salvatorians are called to come out from their hiding places and shake themselves free from their “clubs” in order to go boldly into the public places to plant the seeds of salvation. Salvation should be always in movement, on the road, where ordinary people live their lives and face life’s concrete challenges.

Salvation is not an empty word; rather it bears a human face and a concrete context. It is within this context of the unthinkable violence that destroys innocent lives that Salvatorians are to be the voice of the voiceless and the face of the faceless. Blind violence spreads misery and sickness, poverty, resentment and hatred. When we as Salvatorians contextualize our charism within today’s milieu, in solidarity with each other and with the neglected, the marginalized, and the oppressed, we represent the struggle against the tendency to secularize and privatize the salvific economy. Secularizing and privatizing the grace of salvation defy God’s intention to make of us one human family destined to be a communion of saints.

The world has lost the sense of togetherness. The world seems to have ceased to be one that yearns to become one family of God

destined to be in communion with Him for all eternity. Pope Francis rightly said: "The privatization of salvation is the wrong path".<sup>1</sup> The Lord always saves from within the people's destiny to find justice, peace and happiness together, i.e., within their wholehearted conviction that the grace of God is a being-for-others and a being-with-others. From the moment He calls Abraham, God promises to make of him a people. For this reason, the Pope declares: "We must consider how to rouse one another". Salvation always has a social dimension: it is never confined to the solitary. If I understand salvation in that way, I am mistaken; I am on the wrong path. The Pope wants to remind us that while God has saved us individually, it has always been within the context of his choice to create us as gifts for each other, as a people destined to be people-for-others throughout the history of salvation.

It is for this reason that I voice my conviction that the Salvatorian theology of salvation has to engage in dialogue with families. We have located within ourselves in the world, not as private individuals but as a Church, as the Family of God destined to be eternally in communion with Him. The Church continues to harbour a preferential love for the family, a love to which she gives witness through the Synods of Bishops and through a rich diversity of the means for evangelization. As a "family within a Family," we Salvatorians are called to contribute effectively to the spiritual health of the Church and of humanity by encouraging the globalization of life against precisely the culture that apparently overwhelms our contemporary world, namely, the culture of death.

## **1. View of Fr. Francis Jordan and His Understanding of the Foundation**

Among the many oral discourses of our Venerable Founder, Father Francis Jordan, something he said on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 1899, concerning *Unity* strikes a powerful note in me because of its clear and specific explanation of the originality of his Foundation. He said: *Each Institute has its own spirit. As soon as one deviates from it, he finds himself on the wrong road. An apple*

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<sup>1</sup> www.Zenit.org, Rome, January 29, 2015 at 20:43.

*tree is not a pear tree.*<sup>2</sup> Or, transposed into our African context, we might say, “A mango tree is not an orange tree”. To give emphasis, he continues: *A Franciscan is not a Dominican, a Jesuit is not a Trappist. A Salvatorian, I add, is not a Salesian.*

In other words, the Venerable Father gives accent to the originality of his Foundation. He refuses to confuse his Foundation and its charism with any copy and paste version of orders, congregations, or institutes already present in the Church. The new Foundation bears his trademark even if it carries the same authenticating signature as all other institutes, that of God. He offers a wonderful expansion on this theme in the same talk:

You know that both St. Ignatius and St. Cajetan were founders of religious orders. Both were founders of Societies and yet they differed so much in point of view! St. Cajetan forbids begging; he expects everything from divine Providence. St. Ignatius expressly ordains that all houses of study be well financed, have foundations. The venerable founder Cottolengo built everything on Providence. Don Bosco begs throughout the whole world with his writings. And yet both are guided by one and the same God.<sup>3</sup>

For Father Francis Jordan, God is the common Author of all the existing foundations; yet every foundation is unique in its spirit and in its mission. The essence of Father Jordan’s Foundation resides in its mission, which is to bring **salvation** to all creatures.

## **1.1 The Spirit of the Founder: Jesus is the Saviour**

### **1.1.1 In the Spiritual Diary**

What is the spirit of Fr. Jordan for his new Foundation? On the very first page of his *Spiritual Diary*, we come across the spirit that permeates this Mission-Programme-Word of our Venerable Founder etched in the acronym: *O.A.M.D.G.E.A.S.A.*, i.e., *Omnes ad Majorem Dei Gloriam et ad Salutem Animarum*. This acronym stands for: “All for the greater glory of God and for the salvation

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<sup>2</sup> Talks of Father Francis Jordan, 1899/01/13, 265.

<sup>3</sup> Talks of Father Francis Jordan, 1899/01/13, 265-266.

of souls.” As one easily notices in his *Spiritual Diary*, our Founder used this fundamental formula as a kind of signature or seal.<sup>4</sup>

The word “Salvation” appears 66 times in the *Spiritual Diary*; the word “Saviour” appears 31 times. Jesus Christ as Saviour and the grace of salvation that flows forth from Him must have had a very powerful impact on Fr. Jordan’s life. Our vision of the Salvatorian identity emanates from the all-embracing influence that the Saviour and his saving grace exercised on our Founder.

### **1.1.2 In the SDS Constitutions**

The same observation can be drawn from the Salvatorian Constitutions when we read article 101 on *Our Salvation Call and Mission*, we read:

The kindness and love of God for humanity have appeared in Jesus Christ. In him, the one true Saviour of the world, all people are called to union with God and one another to form the People of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and out of concern for the salvation of all, Father Francis Maris of the Cross Jordan founded the Society of the Divine Saviour and gave it the apostolic purpose to announce to all people that Jesus is the Saviour.

Article 109 states succinctly: The Society is dedicated to the divine Saviour.

This article underscores Jesus as the source, i.e., the origin and author of Salvation. His personal identity is that of Saviour; and by means of his Incarnation, he is the Primordial Presence of the Father’s unconditional love and mercy. It is through Him that salvation reaches all of humanity. The *Charter of the Salvatorian Family* expresses this quite lucidly.

### **1.1.3 In the Charter of the Salvatorian Family**

We read in the first chapter of the Salvatorian Charter on *Our Call and Charism*:

Today the Salvatorian Family has three autonomous branches: the Society of the Divine Saviour, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Saviour, and the International Community of the Divine Saviour. We are united by our commitment to the mission as

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<sup>4</sup> SD I (1/2), 1 ; SD I (67/3), 36-37 ; SD I (176/1).

envisioned by our Founder, forming one family of zealous apostles who announce to all the salvation that has appeared in Jesus Christ (Titus 3:4). Just as Father Jordan's original project evolved over time, we are open to where the Spirit will lead us in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is the unique channel of salvation. In a word, Jesus is not only the Saviour of the world; but in virtue of the fact that his very identity is to be Saviour, he is, so to speak, SALVATION.

We have already reflected upon the fact that the spirit of the new Foundation was hidden within the articulation of its mission as the Charter stipulates it in chapter 2, *Our Mission*:

Following in the footsteps of the Saviour 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).

Our Salvatorian mission is to spread salvation to all of creation and especially to families. The family is under serious threat: indeed it is undergoing a time of grave crisis.

Many of us may have the personal custom of taking an introspective glance into our spiritual life to increase our awareness of who we are. We then realize that we are who we are mainly because of the education, formation, and climate of trust that we have enjoyed as gifts from our parents in the family. We can hardly deny that the family is truly the first school. It is the family that initiates children into all kinds of human relationships. The family exists as an *ecclesiola*, a little church, whereby parents faithfully transmit to their children the basic elements of catechesis and so cultivate the children's friendship with Jesus Christ. In the language of the Second Vatican Council, the Christian family is a 'domestic Church'<sup>6</sup> and 'domestic sanctuary of the Church.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Charter of the Salvatorian Family, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *LG* 11.

<sup>7</sup> *AA11* : "The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfil this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in

Within this domestic Church, parents are called to be the first preachers of the faith to their children.<sup>8</sup> In view of this, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor makes the following point:

Nor should one ignore the fact that parents themselves share in the teaching authority of the Church. It is axiomatic that it is within the Christian family itself that children are taught to worship God and love their neighbour according to the faith given to them in baptism. If the Church really is a family of faith, one will find that the duty of teaching the faith and learning the faith is focused not only in the hierarchy of the Church but also at every level where the Christian community comes together. Thus, in the school, the home, the parish, there will be a relationship between the teacher and the teaching that serves to deepen the unity of the whole family of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

A foremost proponent of this principle of subsidiarity was John Paul II, who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, in the seventeenth paragraph, declares: "The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family." The Synod confirmed this evaluation of the family as an ecclesial community:

Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of the society on which the social edifice is built. The Christian family of Africa will thus become true domestic church, contributing to society's progress towards a more fraternal life.<sup>10</sup>

When the family suffers a crisis, the Church suffers a crisis. The integrity of the Church's faith depends much on the fidelity of the family to the faith. Perhaps we can paraphrase the common French proverb *Tel père, tel fils*, "like father, like son," as *Telle famille, tel monde*, "like family, like world"; or *Telle famille, telle Eglise*, which could literally mean, "like family, like Church". The world is the true mirror of the family; that means one understands the

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the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need."

<sup>8</sup> LG 12.

<sup>9</sup> C. MURPHY – O'CONNOR, *The Family of the Church*, London: Darton Longman and Todd, 11.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 80-85.

current state of the world better by looking at the current state of the family. The world would not be suffering ethical corruption if families, by and large, cultivated excellence in ethics. The Salvatorian charter has touched the essence of the Church mission by reminding us to weave salvation into the fabric that tears apart the family at the seams and so brings division and destruction where there should be fullness of life. Beware of the temptation to accept failure in our mission as an inevitability or even as a possibility; as the Salvatorian Charter exhorts us, “Our personal and communal experience of salvation is the dynamic and animating energy for our mission”.

## **2. The Mission of Fr. Francis Jordan**

### **2.1 Who Is a Salvatorian?**

To understand Fr. Francis Jordan’s sense of the word “mission”, one must rely on the way he defines a Salvatorian. On Good Friday, 13/04/1900, he made an extraordinary exhortation on this topic. He said: *A Salvatorian is a savior of the world: est salvator mundi*.<sup>11</sup> He does not speak of the Christian world but of the entire world without any discrimination because “for God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). He continues: *If you want to call yourself Salvatores mundi, you must seek to become like the Saviour*. This was St. Paul’s aspiration when he declared: “For to me life is Christ death is gain” (Phil 1:21). This Christocentric theology brings to my mind the image of a soldier of Christ as Tertullian envisions him.

By baptism says Tertullian one has made a sacred oath to become the soldier of Christ. Among the many virtues that a soldier

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<sup>11</sup> Fr. Jordan’s sense of the word “saviour” here seems to correspond with Pope St. John Paul II’s explanation of co-saviour in *Salvifici Doloris*, nn. 23-27, especially n. 27. Even though Jesus’ suffering in itself is enough to accomplish the world’s salvation, he, in his infinitely gracious love, has chosen to share his redemptive power with all those who unite themselves to Him in their suffering. Hence they form with Jesus a multiple subject of his supernatural power, i.e., the power that saves the world. (Editor’s note)

cultivates, obedience, discipline, courage and perseverance are the most anticipated. Fr. Francis Jordan is saying almost the same thing even though he underlines only two virtues: "If you want to call yourselves *Salvatores mundi*, you must seek to become like the Saviour especially in these two things: obedience and suffering!" Never shrink from obedience in *omnibus*, in everything", he exhorts.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, it seems that for our Founder, the one who is a Salvatorian is obedient to Christ in everything as a soldier is obedient to his superior. To apply this principle to military life in our day and age, we may expect that the soldier is clever and intelligent enough so that he/she can manipulate sophisticated, up-to-date weapons against the enemy. Nevertheless, to be a soldier of Christ requires another type of armour that the mere human mind cannot easily grasp. Saint Paul describes this armour for us in the letter to Ephesians 4:11-18:

Put on the full armour of God so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens. That is why you must take up all God's armour, or you will not be able to put up any resistance on the evil day, or stand your ground even though you exert yourselves to the full. So stand your ground, with truth as a belt round your waist, and uprightness a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to quench the burning arrows of the Evil One. And then you must take salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God. In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people.

Unless we wear this armour, we cannot be called soldiers of Christ. Our Venerable Father was totally right when he admonished his sons and daughters "to live as true Salvatorians". "Oh how I wish", he says, "that in these days you would really fathom what it means to call yourselves *Salvatores mundi*, Saviours of the

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<sup>12</sup> Talk 1900/04/13, 384-385.

world”. Concisely, “a Salvatorian is a saviour of the world. The Redeemer and Saviour of the world became obedient unto death, even death on the cross”.<sup>13</sup> The Founder goes on to say, “Be Salvatorians through steadfast obedience even to the point of crucifixion! Be Salvatorians in suffering even up to crucifixion; seek to become like the Saviour so that you will not be found unworthy”.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. In the Cross Is Salvation

#### 3.1 Nothing Grows except in the Shadow of the Cross

As I mentioned previously, this particular discourse on a true understanding of what it is to be a Salvatorian is one of the more incisive exhortations of our Venerable Founder. From my perspective, one should contemplate what he said with all its theological weight within the circumstances which he chose for speaking with such dynamism: he chose Good Friday, the day of our redemption. The liturgy highlights what Jesus accomplished on Good Friday, the day of our salvation, by assigning a place of privilege to one of the rituals contained in the liturgy. As the deacon or priest uncovers a cloth that covers the crucifix, he sings, *Behold, the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world. Come, let us adore.*<sup>15</sup> We know that our Venerable Founder cultivated a very deep spirituality of the cross and wished us to do the same, which makes me conclude that the entire gestalt of Jordan spirituality lies hidden in the spirituality of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote: *The works of God prosper only in the shadow of the cross.*<sup>16</sup> He continues: *It belongs to us to glory in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in which is SALVATION, life and resurrection.*<sup>17</sup> The theology of salvation develops in the shadow of the cross because, according to our Venerable Father, “The cross

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<sup>13</sup> Talk 1900/04/13, 384-385.

<sup>14</sup> Talk 1900/04/13, 384-385.

<sup>15</sup> Ritual of the Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday.

<sup>16</sup> SD I (163/6), 107.

<sup>17</sup> SD I (180), 119.

is our life, the cross is our crown, the cross is our glory, the cross is our hope, the cross is our shield, the cross is our protection, the cross is our portion, the cross is our joy."

To underline the close relationship between salvation and the cross, the Venerable Founder gave another challenging admonition:

Why are we afraid of taking up the cross, which leads to the Kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life... in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness. In the cross is perfection of sanctity. Take up your cross, then, and follow Jesus, and you shall go into everlasting life... nothing grows except in the shadow of the cross.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, it becomes clear that the Salvatorian spirituality of salvation as wished by the Venerable Founder finds its inner meaning in the paschal mystery under the shadow of the cross. It is the cross that invigorates its members to become vehicles of the salvation that has appeared in Jesus Christ. We are to become *salvatores mundi* in complete communion with Jesus. This is possible only when "our personal and communal experience of salvation is the dynamic and animating energy for our mission".<sup>19</sup>

Let us not forget that in the cross is salvation, in the cross is life... The question is, what kind of life is this? Jesus gives the answer in his response to Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14-15). Hence, salvation is readily available to everyone who welcomes the grace because as Jesus says, it is a matter of surrendering our eyes, mind and heart to the crucified in order to suffer with him by the stirrings of compassion and so be granted grace and pardon from the One from whom true life springs. In a mysteriously lucid manner, God's Lordship is totally revealed on the Cross. That is why we sing *Reginabis a ligno Deus*, meaning to say that God reigns from the wood [of the cross]. This leads us to affirm that the theology of salvation threads itself through the

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<sup>18</sup> SD II (73/4), 129, 205.

<sup>19</sup> Charter of the Salvatorian Family, 5.

theology of the cross. Where there is the cross, there is salvation; there is life.

### 3.2 Salvation Is Life

The grace of salvation that Jesus offers from the wood of the cross seems to be at the heart of Jesus' opening words when he offers his priestly prayer to the Father. We hear Jesus say to the Father (17:3): "Eternal life is this: to know You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent". There are many who have commented on this verse; I choose that of Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* (Part II). Pope Benedict notes,

"Eternal life" is not – as the modern reader might immediately assume life after death, in contrast to this present life, which is transient and not eternal. "Eternal life" is life itself, real life, which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death. This is the point: to seize "life" here and now, real life that can no longer be destroyed by anything or anyone.<sup>20</sup>

Pope Benedict's manner of commenting on this verse, John 17:3, brings to mind Jesus' declaration to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, in John 11. These words of Jesus seem purely Salvatorian: *He who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die* (John 11:25-26). Pope Benedict continues his elucidation of eternal life:

"Because I live, you will live also", says Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper (Jn 14:19), and he thereby reveals once again that a distinguishing feature of the disciple of Jesus is the fact that he "lives": beyond the mere fact of existing, he has found and embraced the *real* life that everyone is seeking. On the basis of such texts, the early Christians called themselves simply "the living" (*hoi zōntes*). They had found what all are seeking – life itself, full and, hence, indestructible life.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, II, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2011, 72.

<sup>21</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, 72.

... The Christian does not believe in a multiplicity of things. Ultimately he believes, quite simply, in God: he believes that there is only one true God.

This God becomes accessible through the one he sent, Jesus Christ: it is in the encounter with him that we experience the recognition of God that leads to communion and thus to "life"...

"Eternal life" is thus a relational event. Man did not acquire it from himself or for himself alone. Through relationship with the one who is himself life, man too comes alive.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 Life for Africans

Having this in mind, we should look at African life as a 'being with'. By our very nature, we Africans are relational, a 'being with'. This means that we are taught from our very youth through sayings and proverbs that any human being is powerless without the family community, that is to say, without communion. There exist popular proverbs in the hearts and mouths of Africans such as *Mtu ni Watu*, which can literally be translated as "The human being is people" and the second *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa*, which means, "One finger does not pick out a louse." These sayings emphasize the togetherness dimension and underscore the fact that the family is the first place of education and human formation. The family, so to speak, is the first school where every person experiences and tastes the community-communion style of life. There is no individual life, and life outside the community means nothingness. Anyone living outside the community-communion is considered as a living dead. There is no longer life in him or her because to live is to 'be with'. And to be with is to be in harmony with the community-communion.

Once the person's involvement with the family/community disintegrates, once the relation of 'being with' is broken, the member loses his/her integrity and lacks energy and vital force. In order to avoid such a disastrous situation, parents repeat unceasingly to their children this principle of life: 'I am because

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<sup>22</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, 72.

you are; and without you, I am not; you and I are the community.’<sup>23</sup> The moral behind this is to incorporate as much as possible the individual into the large community-communion of brothers and sisters. As the African Synod Fathers emphasized:

By its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household; it is oriented towards society. The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family where citizens are born and it is within the family where they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense of ‘being with’, Africans are conscious of their being for one another and with one another. In *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, Van Pelt splendidly expresses the same idea:

Africans feel responsible for one another and are held responsible for one another by the other groups of related people. They keep in contact with one another and frequently stay with one another. They rely on each other in all circumstances and are very much interested in the family’s offspring.<sup>25</sup>

This is how the extended family in Africa operates. It creates the climate of ‘being with’, of a readiness to relate to others, to help them, to live with them and die for them. Van Pelt goes on to stress that since “the nuclear family is only a cell in the extended family, it is natural that the children belong to the extended family.”<sup>26</sup>

In our tribe, we consider the nuclear family as an island. And no one can live as an island; he will soon die. Africans are called to be open to others, to ‘be with’. This is why an African is

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Eastern African Publications 1994, 108-109; A.E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family. African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1999, 154-155; S. BOCKIE, *Death and the invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief*, Bloomington – Indianapolis, 1993, 10. He is quoted by OROBATOR: ‘No one speaks of ‘my life’ separated from ‘our life’.

<sup>24</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa (EA)*, 85.

<sup>25</sup> P. VAN PELT, *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, Tabora: TMP 1982, 13-15.

<sup>26</sup> P. VAN PELT, *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, 13-15.

evaluated more by what he is than what he has. "To be with" or "not to be with" is the radical question for Africans. To have or not to have comes afterwards. In fact, an African might get rich, but the wealth is not his/her alone. It is for the whole family, because his/her being is always a 'being with'. Otherwise, the more he/she has as a self-concentrated individual, the less he/she is.

Meanwhile, we should know that the 'being with' dimension of Africans goes together with their respect for life. Life is the ultimate reality for Africans. In their concern for life, the Synod declares:

In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. The people of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life... Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family.<sup>27</sup>

The Church is a family that shows this same respect. She stands wholeheartedly for human life. To use Orobator's words, the church as family is at the service of life. He refers to Bishop Laurent Monsengwo who states emphatically: "In a broader sense the Church as Family must always be present on the side of the forces of life in this great battle that pits her against the forces of death until the second coming..."<sup>28</sup>

Placide Tempels stressed the fact that African life is dynamic.<sup>29</sup> Life can either increase or decrease in energy, in vitality or in spirit. But whatever the case may be, Africans always fight for the increase of life. One custom that manifests the African fondness for life is a form of greeting that brings out into the open the need for life. For instance, in many African tribes and especially in the Baluba from the Kongo, when individuals meet, they greet each

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<sup>27</sup> EA 43.

<sup>28</sup> L. MONSENGWO, "L'Eglise famille et images bibliques de l'Eglise", in *Revue Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* 14-15 (1996) 121-138.

<sup>29</sup> P. TEMPELS is a Belgian Franciscan Missionary to Congo who wrote the book *La Philosophie Bantoue* in 1947. This was the very first book dealing with African thought. It provoked controversy among those who read it.

other with the word *moyo* or *kolako*, which means ‘live; be alive’ or ‘be strong’. To live and to be strong are great aspirations for Africans. Life is sacred and therefore nobody can dispose of it as she or he wants. Hence, one may ask: if life is the ultimate reality for Africans, where does life find its fullness?

Obviously, individual life is rooted in the life of the community. Africans will never conceive of life outside of the community because it is the community that gives life and protects it. Whenever life is diminished because of unworthy behaviour, the people of Africa call for reconciliation through the rituals of purification and expiation within the family community. Through these rituals they express their deep religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator, and of the existence of a spiritual world. They feel also the reality of sin and the need for reparation.<sup>30</sup>

The African family, therefore, is a shelter of rest, security, identity, solidarity, and community. Community, in turn, refers to communion of life, mutual participation, belonging together, listening to one another, mutual understanding in frank dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. The philosophy of ‘being with’, ‘increasing life’, and ‘reconciling’ together with the African insight into what a family is can enrich very much our understanding of the nature and the mission of the universal Church.

The Salvatorian theology of salvation in the African context should strive to establish a civilization of life against the culture of death that is being relentlessly perpetuated by an ideology of indifference and relativism supported by powerful multinational organizations. For us Salvatorians, the strife occasioned by this cold war between the two cultures reminds us our primordial and fundamental mission. We are to be “saviours of the world”, i.e., co-redeemers, by accepting the cross of Jesus in our hearts and by spreading the culture of life. We are to carry within our souls the conviction that the world – and every family, community and society within the world – needs Jesus as its Redeemer: “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (John

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<sup>30</sup> EA, 42.

10:10). It is our mission to remind Africans, indeed all people, that by the grace of the redemption, they too become co-redeemers when they unite their suffering, in an act of communal love, to the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

In other words Jesus, the Saviour of the world is saying: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he die". Life in the Saviour does not come to an end because it is true and everlasting.

#### **4. Our Charism in Four Words: *Salus tua ego sum*<sup>31</sup>**

An event in the Gospel of Luke expresses a meaningful insight into this motto, *Salus tua ego sum*. It seems true that the Founder never used this reference in his spiritual diary, but it seems to dovetail beautifully with our charism. I am referring to the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10.

It is said that Zacchaeus was not so much seeking to see Jesus but rather was seeking to ascertain who Jesus was. He was a chief of the tax collectors (St Matthew was one) and also a wealthy man. For sure he was not an ordinary man. His problem is that he could not see Jesus because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. Let us underline one fact: Zacchaeus was seeking to determine who

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<sup>31</sup> In the Mother House Chapel of the Salvatorian Sisters in Rome, there is a nice painting on the central wall with the logo: *Salus tua ego sum*; I am your Salvation. I compare this logo to the Gospel of Saint Mark, which is short, clear, concise and precise. Why can we not use this logo as a leitmotiv for the entire Salvatorian family?

Where does this logo come from? Some years ago, I did a simple investigation in order to find out the origin of the Sisters' logo. This motto seems to have originated from Father Pancrace Pfeifer. In the square of our Mother House, there is a statue of the Divine Saviour with these words in Latin: *Ego Deus Tuus Salvator Tuus*; I am your God and your Saviour. This statue was inaugurated in 1925. Furthermore, it is very interesting to know that the same words are found on the Statue of the Saviour on the top of the Mother House of the Jesuits. The Jesuits' Saviour can be seen from far away especially during the night because it shines. We can read on the sculpture, this time, in Italian: *Io sono la Tua Salvezza*; in Latin "*Salus tua ego sum*" and in English "I am Your Salvation".

Jesus was. You can see Jesus without knowing who Jesus really is. You can see Jesus passing by without recognizing Him. Zacchaeus took the initiative, but he failed to reach the essential.

The human person, by his own private endeavour, cannot possess God. The initiative should come from God. Zacchaeus did his level best: he ran ahead and even climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. What was the result of his efforts? It was not really he who saw Jesus; it was Jesus who looked up and saw him.

The look of Jesus is extraordinary; it penetrates the depths of the heart. It is a gaze that saves. It restores the lost human being to his/her intimate relationship with the Creator. From the saving gaze originates a wonderful call: “Zaccheus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5). Jesus adds: “Today, salvation has come to this house... Zaccheus, I am your Salvation” (cf. 19:9).



Zacchaeus came down quickly and received Jesus with joy. Salvation transforms your heart and your life. It makes you stand firm on your two feet. You no longer have to climb or look for support from something else. Salvation itself upholds you. Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over" (Luke 19:8). By distributing his property to the poor, Zacchaeus is reciting implicitly Psalm 27:1: "The Lord is my light and my salvation", whom should I fear?"

*Salus tua ego sum* means in this context, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay in your house". On account of this proclamation of salvation, people started grumbling and said, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner".

How many people would like to know Jesus, to see who Jesus is and they cannot because of the crowd that saturates the world with all its pleasures, manipulations, deceptions, suspicions, threats, seductions, power plays, indifferences and all manner of obstacle, temptation and challenge. The world is hanging from a tree, a big tree like that of the sycamore tree that Zacchaeus climbed. We as Salvatorians must play fully the role of Jesus.

We are the ones to gaze upon the trees that harbour those who are confused, disillusioned, disappointed and discouraged; we are the ones to bring them salvation – to bring them to Jesus. To look into the tree is to be able to read the signs of times. The salvation that springs forth from the crucified Christ always corresponds to the milieu of the people to whom we are sent. Pope Francis rightly says: *I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them.* From us Salvatorians, the world awaits Salvation – the world awaits Jesus Christ – and that is everything.

Therefore, *Salus tua ego sum* should be a truth of faith, a truth in love that gives us dynamism. It forces us to abandon old ways of thinking and to live our charism. The question is no longer how we are going to live our charism in our contemporary milieu; rather how do God and people today want us to live our charism in this

rapidly changing world. For that Pope Francis' invitation should never leave us at peace:

I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. "Go into all the world"; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. Mk 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine... Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be satisfied by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, and love by giving love. I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, apostolate should be adjusted to new needs.<sup>32</sup>

We give life, we give hope and we give love to those who in their fragility bring to the forefront their new needs: those who have attracted my attention are the families to be catechized. They need to regain their original mission of bringing to birth a thriving domestic church. They need to recover their stature as the first school for children and an oasis of peace, of true life, and of salvation.

Nobody can deny the pivotal position of the family in every human society. There is no society without family. Hence, the family is the foundation rock upon which the society is built. This is a very significant reason for giving major priority to the evangelization of the family in general and to the African family in particular.<sup>33</sup> God Himself elevated and sanctified the institution of the family by His incarnation – by his choice to enter into human history as a Redeemer who is born into and grows up in a human

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<sup>32</sup> Pope FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter, *To all Consecrated People*, Vatican, 21 November 2014.

<sup>33</sup> *EA*, 80.

family. God, therefore, wants to show how open the family is to every human being. God wants to bring into evidence how open the Church, the Family of God, is to every human being. Consequently, we as Salvatorians should meet God's desire to show how open we as a religious congregation are to every human being. Happy to find ourselves within Jesus' declaration that he is our Salvation – *Salus tua ego sum* – we should be in the front line for designing new strategies and new pastoral plans in order to evangelize families and encourage them to give Jesus Christ a dwelling place in their midst.

## Conclusion

We may synthesize the keynote of the Salvatorian charism in a single affirmation: *Salus tua ego sum*. Jesus is our salvation. This affirmation identifies us as those who, graced by the Saviour, are called to be collaborators in the task of redeeming the world. United with Jesus, we form a multiple subject of his supernatural power. God requires us to be *Salvatores mundi*, co-redeemers. The Salvatorian Charter is a call. The words of the logo *Salus tua ego sum* should awaken us from our tendency to find a comfortable niche for ourselves so that we may live the grace of our charism and the requirements of our mission in a manner that does not stop short of the expansive parameters of the divine will. Our charism should inspire us to reach out to those who are perennially the neediest. With Jesus as our backbone, the conviction *Salus tua ego sum* should enable us to reach families in the public sphere, on the street, and labouring under the burdens of life's journey. It should lead us to families to enkindle in them the light of the risen Christ because the salvation of the world passes through the family. Our Salvatorian mission calls us to develop apostolic skills, to be broad-minded, to act and think in the manner of the local culture, always faithful to the universal Church. We must respond to the call to bring salvation to the streets, to the neglected, the forsaken, the unloved, and the deprived. We must bring the grace of salvation to the existential peripheries since we are the world, we are the family, we are the Church. May we be so dedicated to the service

of others that the whole human family may become a pleasing sacrifice to the honour of the *Salvator mundi*, Jesus Christ!