

# UNIVERSALITY IN THE SALVATORIAN FAMILY CHARTER AND ITS ROOTS IN FATHER JORDAN

Janet E. Bitzan SDS

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Salvatorians are, of their very essence, universal. In the earliest available written formulation of Father Jordan's program, known as the *Smyrna Draft*, Father Jordan (1880) articulated the universal character of The Apostolic Teaching Society. The goal of the society, he wrote, includes working, not only for one's own sanctification and perfection, but also so that "every thinking creature may more and more come to know the true God and Him whom He has sent, Jesus Christ..." Today, Father Jordan's Society has evolved into the Salvatorian Family – priests, deacons, religious men and women, and lay people joined together to continue "Jesus life-giving work of bringing salvation to all creation and liberation from all that is a threat to fullness of life" (Charter, para. 10). The idea of bringing salvation to the whole world is one of the three fundamental aspects of the Salvatorian characteristic known as "universality." For Salvatorians, universality is a call to minister to all people, with all people who are called to share in the Salvatorian charism and mission, and by all ways and means that are inspired by the love of God.

## Universality as a call to minister to all people

At the time when Father Jordan was attempting to draft a plan for his Society, he prayed, "Oh my Lord and my God, with Your help grant that I may be able to carry out that undertaking for Your honor, so that all may be imbued with Your sacred doctrine..." (*Spiritual Diary* [SD]I 120). This society, he noted, will be "A Catholic Society of clerics and workers in the Lord's vineyard among all nations" (SD I 124). Following the approval of his constitutions for the Society in 1886, Father Jordan wrote, "Believe, trust, hope, love, work – You must lead all to Christ. You are in debt to all, to whatever nation they belong" (SD I 192). Salvatorians are to be among *all peoples*, in *all nations*, so that *all* may know Christ and His Church.

**We make the  
eternal truths of  
the Word of God  
and our Faith  
accessible to  
persons of any  
culture, race,  
ethnic group,  
social class,  
nationality and  
religion.  
*Charter # 8c***

Like Father Jordan, Salvatorians of today proclaim Jesus Christ to a "world in need of God" (Charter, para. 1). We are urged 'not to rest until all persons on earth know, love and glorify God' (Charter, Preface). The idea of never resting makes our mission sound exhausting. However, the work that Father Jordan did for the glory of God was not always difficult or painful. Father Jordan realized early on that the work of saving

souls is an exalted task because it is a participation in the redeeming work of the Savior. He cited Dionysius the Areopagite, a Greek or Syrian theologian and philosopher (c. 500 AD), who expressed this thought, "The most divine of all divine things is to work with God for the salvation of souls" (SD I 99). Work done with the right intention provided Father Jordan with spiritual joy, consolation, peace of heart (SD I 134) and sweetness (SD I 138).

## Universality as the call to minister with all people

The *Smyrna Draft* (1880) delineated the original composition of the three “degrees” of the Apostolic Teaching Society. The first degree consisted of priests of all Catholic rites, sisters, and lay people who were willing, like the Apostles, to devote themselves totally to the work of the Society. These full time members were especially charged with teaching in “schools and seminaries for the indigenous in their own lands...wherever the glory of God will call for it.” The second degree was to be made up of “well educated and scholarly people, clerical and lay, who already have their own profession and remain in their careers.” They were charged with “spreading and promoting Catholic education and teaching as far as they are able...” And, finally, the third degree consisted of both lay men and lay women. These lay members were charged with “protecting the children entrusted to them” and ensuring that these children received a “good Catholic education and upbringing.”

In 1883, Fr. Bonaventure Lüthen, a beloved confrere of Father Jordan, wrote, “In our day, indeed, more than ever before, each one must help with all his might to save souls. Let each one do so wherever and in whatever way he can- but let him do something! And to him who would like to join with us, we reach out our hands as brothers in holy alliance, praying the Almighty that with His angels He may bless and seal the alliance (*The Missionary*, #7). There was a place for every person in the young Society.

In her excellent paper, *Universality as Inclusive Love...*, S. Carol Thresher (1997) stated that membership of the original core group of the Apostolic Teaching Society “shows us how inclusive his [Father Jordan’s] vision really was...What was important to him was the zeal and fire in the heart of these apostles. The nationality, gender, class, church status, or race of the person was secondary”. (pp. 65-66) As Father Jordan wrote to the members on Passion Sunday, 1913, “A Society destined for all people is in debt to all. Therefore, be inclusive in your love for peoples of whatever race or nation.” (Cited in Cerletty, 1988, p. 88)

Constituted as Father Jordan first envisioned the Apostolic Teaching Society, made up of three degrees based on one’s level of involvement, the Society lasted for just over one year. For “whatever the reasons, [Father] Jordan changed the Society into a religious congregation [of men] in March, 1883” (Schommer, 1992, p. 183) and, at the same time founded a canonical women’s congregation. The lay membership, of which there were an unknown number in the first and second degrees and “more than 1000 members in the third degree” (Skwor, 1995, p. 219), became dormant until it reemerged in a different form in 1971. This “different form” is now the Lay Salvatorian part of the Salvatorian Family.

The members of the Salvatorian Family in the 21<sup>st</sup> century consist of priests, deacons, religious men, religious women, and lay persons. Lay members are men and women, single or married. “We live our call in equality and complementarity in ways appropriate to our diverse states in life, gifts, and cultures” (Charter, para. 4). “We seek to provide a visible

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***Charter # 14***

witness of men and women from diverse cultures and backgrounds working side-by-side in mission. We nurture trust and respect for the differences among us, learn from one another, and value the contribution that each is able to make for our life and mission” (Charter, para.14).

Universality is evident in the diversity of our membership as well as in a widespread sense of hospitality and our invitation to people in Salvatorian parishes and institutions, as well as related organizations, to join us in our mission. Like our Founders, we are convinced “of the vocation of all the baptized to be a living force in the Church and for a just world...” (Charter, para.7)

### **Universality as the call to use all ways and means**

As we have seen, Father Jordan’s earliest plans for the Society as well as the membership of the Salvatorian Family today includes people from all ages and all walks of life, working together to accomplish the mission. Father Pancratius Pfeiffer (1919), the second General Superior of the Society, noted that it was Father Jordan’s aim from the beginning, not only to glorify God and make God known everywhere, but also to do so by employing all ways and means.

Early in the Spiritual Diary, Father Jordan had counseled himself, “In every way possible die to yourself and live for God alone” (SD I 21). And, while he was in Jerusalem, determined “as soon as possible [to] carry out that work which God wills,” (SD I 152a) Father Jordan wrote, “Use every lawful means at your disposal” (SD I 153a). In the very first issue of *The Missionary*, Father Lüthen wrote, “Every lawful means is agreeable to us: science and art, instructions and missions, periodicals and societies, - as much as in us lies we wish to help promote all these things, in order thus to animate the people anew with holy zeal for faith and virtue” (Pfeiffer, 1930, p. 81).

Later, while writing the Constitutions of the Society, Father Jordan instructed the members to use “all ways and means which the love of Christ inspires” to glorify and make God known, to exalt the Mother of God, and to “save immortal souls” (Pfeiffer, 1919, p. 3). Father Pfeiffer also noted that Father Jordan considered universality of ways and means to be an essential and characteristic feature of the Society. “Every limitation was foreign to him [Father Jordan] and was to remain foreign to the Society” (Pfeiffer, 1919, p. 3).

There is, in fact, only *one* limitation placed on the means used in Salvatorian ministries. We must use *only* those means which are inspired by our love of God. “Our spirit of universality is expressed by all ways and means which the love of God inspires” (Charter, para. 8). Father Pfeiffer assured us that the love of God can only inspire “good means” and, therefore, Salvatorians can “use whatever means we are able to, in consideration of the possibilities at our disposal” (Pfeiffer, 1919, p. 4).

In 1920, when some of the members were questioning whether Salvatorian priests should quit their ministry in schools, Father Pfeiffer pointed out that the decision regarding which means should be emphasized and used most at a given time depends on the existing circumstances...like the choice of medicine for an illness. “We have to concede that, presently, after the terrible world-wide catastrophe [WWI], people are dazed and need to be jolted; this can be accomplished, as has been proven, in a special way through parish

missions. Therefore, at this time, in our opinion they seem to be one of the first and most urgent means.” (Pfeiffer, 1920, p. 25) This passage indicates that Fr. Pfeiffer understood that different ministries might be appropriate in different historical contexts. Universality enables Salvatorians to adapt to what are frequently referred to as the “signs of the times.”

Forty-five years later, Father Leonard Gerke stated that the sons and daughters of Father Jordan “must be ready and willing to do anything, to use any means, to try any way, which the saving love of Christ might inspire, and which, in the concrete situation, would be indicated by Divine Providence” (Gerke, 1965, p. 12). A similar idea was echoed by Sister Miriam Cerletty (1997) in her paper, *All Ways and Means*. “The gift of all ways and means is to be both treasured and respected. It may not be interpreted, however, in an absolute way. It requires prayerful discernment.” (p. 4) Universality of ways and means signifies that Salvatorians use resources as well as their individual gifts and talents in varied ways in different situations. Prayer and discernment inspire and give direction to Salvatorian actions.

## **Conclusion**

Universality is an enduring characteristic of Salvatorians. The roots of universality can be discovered in the personal writings of Father Jordan and in the earliest official documents of the Society. For this reason, the various aspects of universality have been incorporated into the present day Salvatorian Family Charter. Salvatorians minister to all people, near and far, to make known to all the one true God and Jesus Christ, so that they and the people they serve might have eternal life. Salvatorians carry out this mission as “one family of zealous apostles who announce to all the salvation that has appeared in Jesus Christ.” (Titus 3:4 as cited in the Charter, para. 3)

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Re-read the Salvatorian Family Charter in light of this article.
  - a. Note words or phrases that speak to you and ask: “What is this saying to me and how will I respond?”
  - b. What could be some implications for the Salvatorian Family in your area of the world, and/or globally?
2. In light of this article, if you were to revise the Salvatorian Family Charter, what would you add or change?
3. What concrete experience of universality do I have? Does this experience contribute to my inner growth?
4. “To work with God for the Salvation of souls” (Fr. Jordan). What does this mean today for me/us? How would I translate it into today’s language?

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