



November 2016

LAY-SALVATORIANS – DISCOVERING THEIR IDENTITY

Dear sisters and brothers,

A recurring concern over time, has been the question of our Salvatorian identity. In the same way we could also call it a „salvatorian profile“ – just what makes up a Salvatorian? It does not matter if it is a priest, a brother, a sister or a Lay-Salvatorian, someone would think at first. But exactly here the difficulties start, because what is the point of Salvatorians? What makes a Salvatorian? Is this valid for all three branches in the same form, and equally pronounced? With those questions alone you are already in a considerably tense field.

Identity - what is it and why do I need it?

The identity is usually used to identify a particular thing or person. It is the special characteristic which distinguishes or emphasizes this one person or a group of persons, etc. from others. Most people now tend to arrange everything nicely in some form - or rather, to put it “into a box”. Each (and every) person has to fit in someone. However, if there are people who neither properly fit into the one or any other, or perhaps even fill in more than one, or one only partially, then it becomes difficult. Where do they really belong?

This question arises not only for outsiders, but rather for my own ego, too - where do I really belong. Every child asks about his ancestors, his family, his community, the place or the environment to which he is attached - in other words the question of one's own membership. If this desire is not satisfied, uncertainty and instability arise. As a result, I can sometimes easily become a plaything for others because I have nothing on which I can base my self-confidence and justify my being.

When it comes to identity, the experience or the life story must not be ignored. As the idiom says it so beautiful, things are sometimes put into the cradle - or sometimes not. God's work on each individual is unique, perhaps once similar - but never to equate with others. Thus the work of God also has a great influence on the identity - on what we are, and the direction where we strive.

The term "laity" - often misunderstood today

When the laity are mentioned in the (catholic) church today, this is frequently equated with the "ignorant". It associates that such people are "not experts" and, so if we follow on the thought, they might better leave their fingers off the matter of which they do not understand.

The term "lay" comes from the Greek word "laós", which means "people". Therefore a “lay” is someone who belongs to the people. The word "laós" has a very positive meaning in Biblical thinking. In all the important theological points, it is not mentioned the simple people, or even the primitive masses, as opposed to the leaders, but the chosen people, the people of God. There is only one people, one “laós”, next to it are the “éthne”, the pagan nations - and Israel is the people in the Old (First) Testament par excellence.

Also in the New (Second) Testament, the people belonging to God, those who believe in Christ are called "laós". The Christian Church appears as the people of God now. God himself has "acquired from among the Gentiles a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). And Paul wrote, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God." (Rom 9: 25f.). Seen in this theologically filled sense, "laós" is the highest title of honor that can be given to a Christian. One is laity, if one belongs to the people of God, if one believes in Christ and is called by him. To this extent, all, of course, also the officials, are "laity". The term lay distinguishes the faithful from the unbelievers, the people from the non-people, the Christians from the non-Christians. But he does not designate different stands within the church.

However, our term "laity" does not derive directly from "laós", but from the adjective "laikós ... belonging to the people". This term encompasses things and persons who have no relation to liturgy. "Laikós" that is the rural population unlike the leading circles in the city. This term "laikós", from which our word "laity" has developed, is not used in the New Testament. A kind of inner-church difference between a leading class responsible for liturgy and the masses of the common people who do not have access to it is incompatible with the image of the Church, as the New Testament shows. Rather, it is true that all are "brothers and sisters".

At this point the Second Vatican Council proceeds further and points out that this is the people of God. These people of God stand with both legs in the midst of life with its everyday challenges. The laity are the real experts of everyday life, because they are called by their experiences to tell their faith and their hope and to invite others. Thus, as laity, we must not hide or resign ourselves. No, rather, it is our task in everyday life to give testimony of our faith, our hope and our confidence. And as Fr. Jordan remarked, God often seeks the seemingly unsuitable people for his tasks. This should give each of us the courage to trust and use our own talents (→ the "tools" we brought along).

And the Lay-Salvatorian identity?

Johann Baptist Jordan had a rich experience on the spreading spiritual distress and impoverishment in his years as journeyman or at the railway construction. So the question was almost self-evident to him: How could one bring God's love back to the people, if technics, economy and politics changed so quickly. How to give answer to them when they seek God in this changed world. Two things seemed to him to be particularly important:

- The work must be comprehensive and should not be limited to any particular area because the questions and challenges of life are becoming more and more diverse (different cultures or ways of living) for people;
- and the laity must be actively involved in it, because only they succeed in meeting people in those places where they do not reckon with a "religious" in the traditional sense.

Fr. Bonaventura Lüthen summarized the program of Fr. Jordans in June 1882:

"The pastor in the pulpit, in the confessional, at the altar, is no longer sufficient; We must have pastoral workers of laity who teach and defend the gospel on the great pulpit of the world through word and life by their actions and their confident manner."

If you look back at Fr. Jordan's original idea with the three degrees, you can see that the laity were present there in every variant. He had no doubt that such laity should not be second-class religious or just substitutes of them. On the contrary, a co-operation was planned on the basis of teamwork on a broad fundamental.

Of course, such laity are not easy to find on the street or at mass on next Sunday. For this purpose certain conditions are required to carry out this universal Salvatorian service; creativity, faithfulness, pronounced prayer life, self-reflection, joy in working with people and gathering new experiences, willingness to learn new things all the time, etc. At the first moment, this sounds as if only superhuman beings were asked. No- that is not correct. Much more are real enthusiasts addressed, who want to bring the love of God into their world with all ways and means they have available. Men and women who have the burning flame of the faith inside.

You see it is not possible to take on this challenge without a special vocation – the Lay-Salvatorian vocation. Lay-Salvatorians have their own and important tasks in proclaiming and carrying the faith to others. In particular, they are a link in the renewal and adaptation of beliefs to the modern world, precisely in the way that Fr. Jordan saw it in his vision.

Let's pray that all Salvatorians will discover this treasure of our founder more and more and support the Salvatorian Family.

Yours sincerely,



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