

FROM THE BEGINNING, AN INCLUSIVE VISION

The man now honoured as Venerable Francis Mary Jordan was born in Gurtweil, Germany, on June 16, 1848. On the following day he was baptized at the local parish church with the name John Baptist.

Being brought up in a poor family, he was not able to realize his dream of becoming a priest, although as a teenager he had already become aware of his vocation at the moment of his First Communion. After finishing primary school he worked as a journeyman and painter-decorator, traveling throughout Germany. John Baptist noticed the difficult spiritual situation of his homeland and of the other European countries, as people abandoned the practice of their faith. The Church in Germany was limited in performing its mission by the state (Kulturkampf). All these experiences strengthened Jordan's faith and conviction that he was called to be a priest. In 1869, he finally resolved to pursue his vocation and began his formal studies. Despite being older than his classmates, John Baptist worked hard and discovered a gift for languages; for the graduation exam he presented an essay in eight European languages and another one in four other languages.

Finally, in 1874 John Baptist began his studies of theology and philosophy. He used these years of study to deepen his faith and spirituality. He continued receiving the sacraments regularly, which had been his usual practice since childhood, and he devoted much time to prayer. He also began his lifelong practice of writing his Spiritual Diary in which he recorded texts that inspired him and the prayers of his heart. In the years since his death, this diary has become an invaluable source of knowledge for his personality and spirituality.

John Baptist was ordained a priest on July 21, 1878. A short time later, at the request of his bishop, he left for Rome to begin studies of languages, including Syrian, Aramaic, Coptic, Arabic, as well as Hebrew and Greek.

From the time of his theological studies John Baptist had a growing sense that he was being called by God to found a new apostolic work in the Church, in which members would defend the Faith by proclaiming to all people that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. This conviction became even stronger during a trip to the Middle East in 1880. After his return to Rome he started implementing his idea of founding a new community of priests, religious and lay Christians. This "Apostolic Teaching Society" would be organized into three groups, called "grades": the first one for those who, like the Apostles, leave everything and, living community life, devote themselves entirely to proclaiming the Good News; the second for academics, who spread the Divine truths by publications; and the third for those lay people who, remaining in their families and within the reality of their everyday life, would proclaim the Savior above all through the witness of a good Christian life.

The First Grade of the Apostolic Teaching Society was initiated on December 8, 1881. A year later the name of the community was changed to the "Catholic Teaching Society" and that November the growing community moved into the palazzo that continues to serve as the Society's Motherhouse. Several months later the Holy See order a change to the Society, dividing the community into two distinct religious congregations, one of men and one of women. A few years later the community of women formally separated from Jordan, becoming the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. In 1893, the men's community received its current name: Society of the Divine Savior.

Father Jordan devoted himself totally to the work of developing his institute as its founder, spiritual guide, and superior general. These roles were not easy for him, as they called for serious effort, especially when he faced different organizational, financial and personnel difficulties. At the same time, however, it gave him a profound internal joy, based on his unshakeable trust in Divine Providence and on his deep conviction that it was the way of putting into life his foundational vocation and a contribution to the salvation of souls.

Thanks to his great determination, he founded a second female religious congregation (Sisters of the Divine Savior) in 1888 with Therese von Wuellenweber (now honoured as Blessed Mary of the Apostles). Another important development was Father Jordan's Society taking over a mission in Assam, India, as well as founding new houses of the Society in various countries of Europe and other parts of the world. Through all these experiences Father Jordan matured as a human being, as a religious, and as a priest and founder, developing his personality and growing spiritually. The foundation of this spiritual growth was his deep love of God and neighbor, his perseverance in prayer, his trust in Divine Providence, as well as his humility, love for the Eucharist, courageous acceptance of the cross, and fidelity to the Church. Over the course of time Father Jordan began to be considered as a man who led a holy life, both by the members of his community and by people from outside. At the same time he witnessed the important development of his work both geographically and numerically.

In 1915, following the outbreak of World War I, the Society leadership, including Father Jordan, was forced to move from Rome to Switzerland, a politically neutral country. After withdrawing from the active administration of his institute at the General Chapter in 1915, Father Jordan spent the last three years of his life in Fribourg, Switzerland. He died in a small hospice in Tafers near Fribourg on September 8, 1918 and was buried in the local parish church. In 1956 his mortal remains were transferred to the Society's Motherhouse in Rome. In 1942 the process for his beatification was officially started. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI published the Decree on Father Jordan's Heroic Virtues, bestowing on him the title "Venerable."