

# THE GENERAL FORMATION PLAN (GFP) 2023

## Catechesis

# 4



# 4 Passionist Formation in a Post-modern Context

*Fr. Ademir Guedes Azevedo, C.P.*

In what world context can formation to proclaim the *memoria passionis* be done? In what reality are societies situated? Do the formators present young people with the complexity of today's world? Is it enough to be psychologically calm and conformed to the status quo that we inherited from the past? What language and style should be used to translate the richness of the charisma of these past 300 years of our existence? What does this world consist of and what is the profile of the Passionist for this world? This is only a very tentative attempt to answer these questions, but perhaps it can open a window to allow new winds to pass through our houses of formation.

In 1979, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) published an important work, *La Condition Postmoderne*, which provided a historical framework for Western thought-- he philosophically presented the concept of "postmodernity". Lyotard understood that today's societies are no longer legitimized by the same epistemological status that was used in modernity. According to Perry Anderson, modernity was legitimized by two meta-narratives. The first derives from the French Revolution and claimed to place humanity as the agent of its own freedom as it grows in knowledge. Reason and freedom, therefore, walk hand in hand. The second meta-narrative consists of German idealism, which saw the spirit as a progressive revelation of truth.[1] These two main meta-narratives legitimized the discourse of modernity.



However, Lyotard's work analyzes precisely the crisis of such meta-narratives, since there is a new language of legitimization for post-industrial societies that conditioned a lifestyle no longer homogeneous, but heterogeneous; no longer universal, but contingent; no longer totalitarian, but plastic and fluid; [2] a discourse born of diverse cultures and not of a single Culture; in short, the new social configuration of existence in the post-industrial societies in which we live presents a new way of life that is destined to walk in the footsteps of postmodernism,



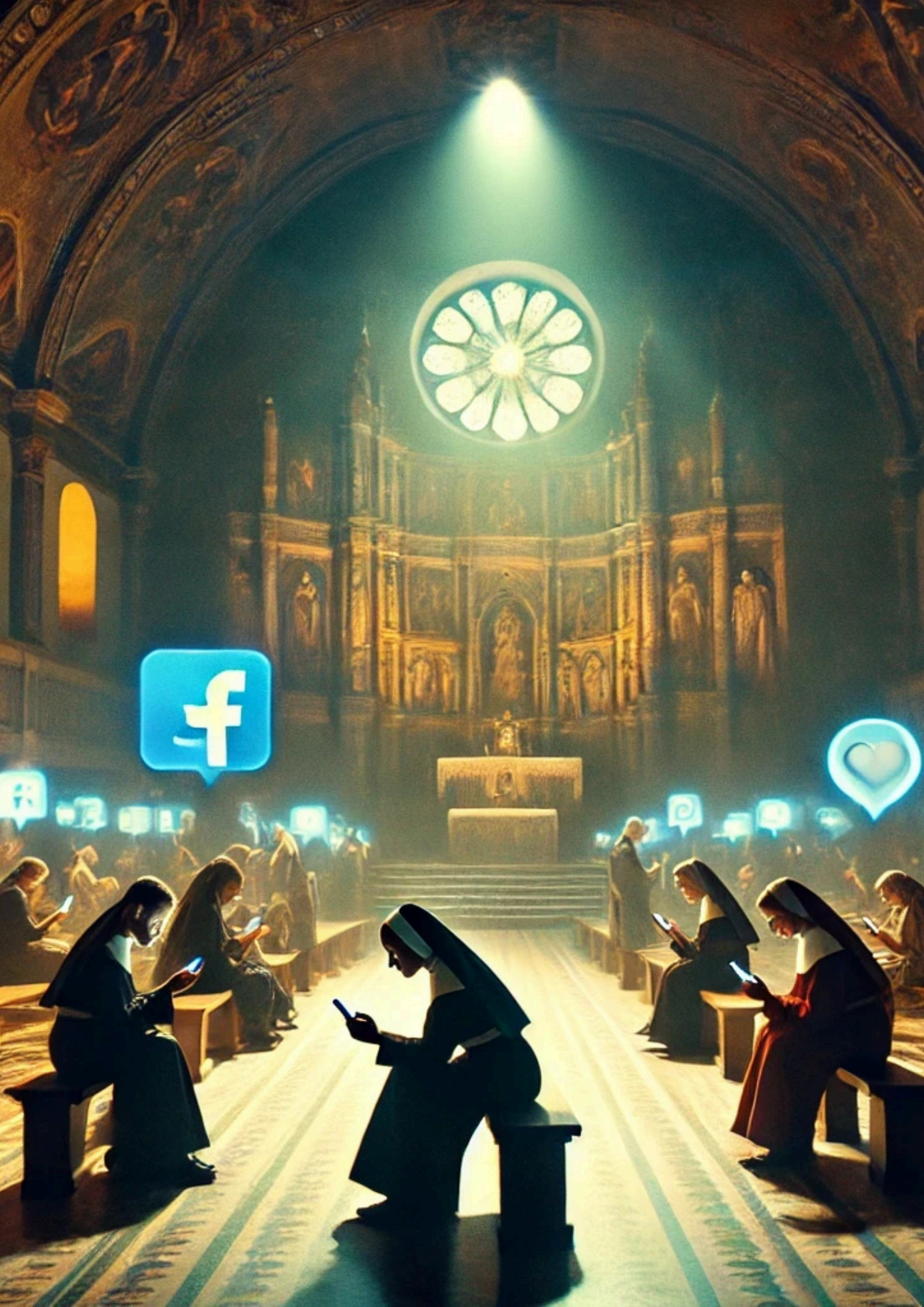
which refuses to accept the old way of life that modern reason dreamed of for the West. In this respect, Lyotard affirms: "[...] disbelief in relation to metanarratives is considered 'postmodern' [...]. To the disuse of the metanarrative device of legitimization corresponds above all the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and that of the university institution that depended on it". [3]

Metaphysics, as a universal model of thought, influenced religious and priestly formation for centuries. This deductive way

of thinking was intended to solve all the problems of existence: politics, economics, ethics, education, even the discourse of faith could not escape its rules. Metaphysics is the mother of all sciences; it commands and embraces everything. Outside of it there is the impossible, nothingness. Being is metaphysics.

The language to speak of God is metaphysics. But it is exactly this cultural heritage that becomes the favorite target of the criticism of postmodernity. Western reason itself tried to expose the metaphysical critique from various perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> Lyotard, J-F., *A condição pós-moderna*, 15.



Take, for example, what Nietzsche (1844-1900) says in his Zarathustra: "I exhort you, my brothers! Remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak of superterrestrial hopes. They are poisoners, whether they know it or not."[4]

The postmodern person feels uncomfortable with totalitarian and homogeneous discourses that pretend to offer a unique answer to the painful and complex human existence, struck by multiple and different problems. Here lies the challenge for formation-- to coexist with "complexity"[5] without attacking it with a meta-narrative indifferent to the life of the world.

The Passionists were born in a context of modernity. Formation was legitimized by these meta-narratives, especially those of scholastic origin. The environment, marked by strong contestation of atheism, pantheism and deism was confronted by powerful and efficient apologetics for that time. Nothing could escape the metaphysical phrases of the encyclicals of the great popes. Never had the deposit of faith been so well guarded and defended.

The question that now arises is a totally different one-- the world has bid farewell to meta-narratives; they are just a precious heritage of a bygone era. We now live in the realm of the postmodern. The West has created a communication system where everyone is free to voice and say what they think. Digital media legitimizes postmodernity. Who can resist the fascination of social networks and messaging applications? Novitiates and religious houses of formation have been influenced by cell phones that connect us to people and occupy most of the time of religious.

It is no longer modern reason that controls, but individual freedom that gives wings to the imagination of religious who, thanks to new forms of technology, can get to know other worlds and new experiences,



even if at a distance. The new way of legitimizing life in postmodernity makes society more "transparent".[7]

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Assim falava Zarathustra*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Morin, E., *La sfida della complessità*, 27.

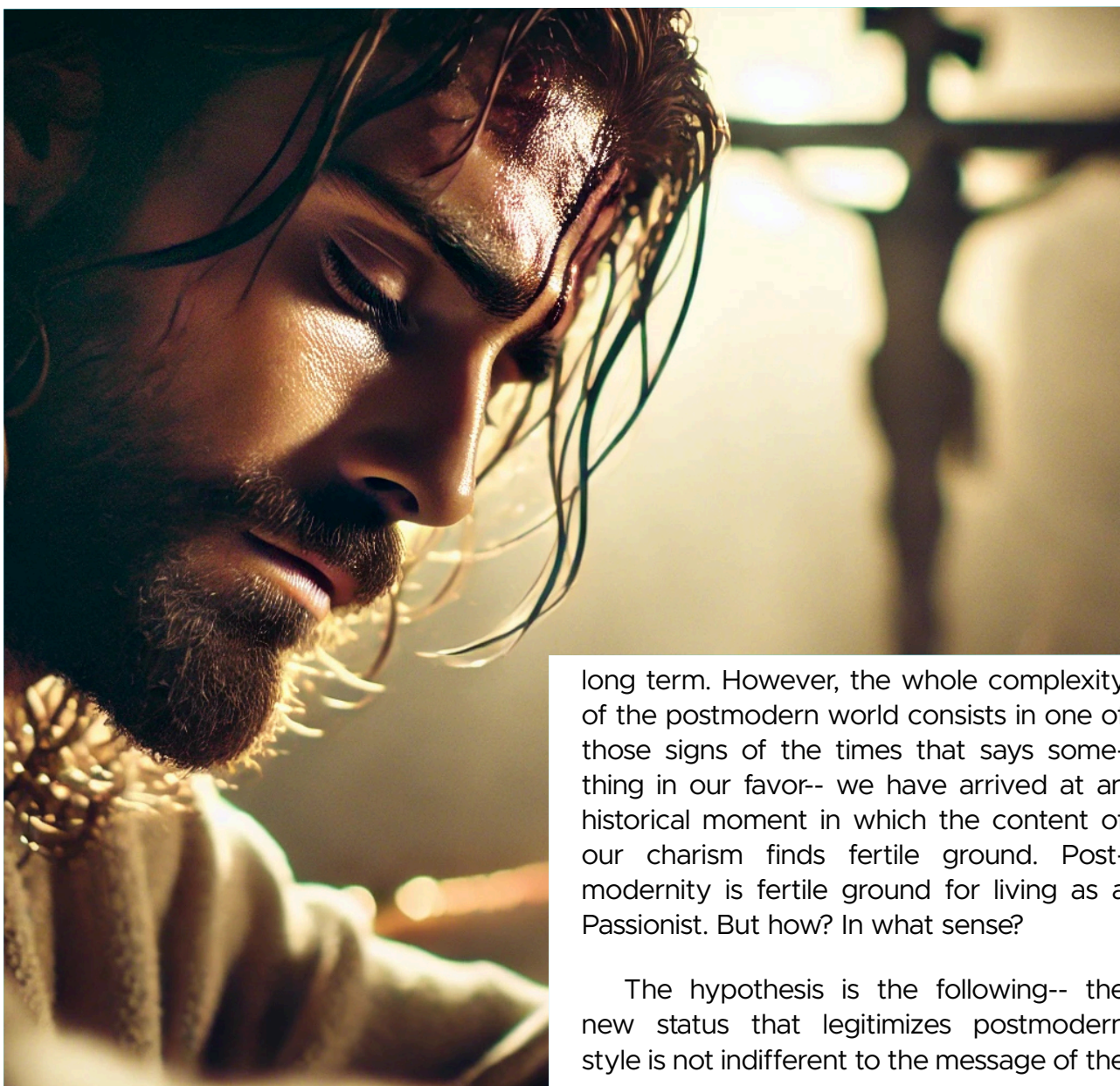
<sup>6</sup> On the development of apologetics and how theology addressed the problem of unbelief in the modern age. cf. Libanio, J., *A revelação na modernidade*, 33-37.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Vattimo, G., *A sociedade transparente*, 10.

If modernity was governed by rational grammar, marked by strong categories, postmodernity is formed by the various "language games", which can only be interpreted through their contextual histories. Postmodernity is legitimized by weak concepts, [8] in which the various ways of interpreting life in its innumerable forms count.

What is the path for formation? To identify a specific one is a modern act; it would be a step backwards. It is better to think about the roads ahead to travel. This new way of inhabiting the world may seem a threat to the Passionist life, since fluidity and speed end up placing in crisis the projects we are accustomed to elaborate on in the

**"Postmodernity is fertile ground for living as a Passionist"**



long term. However, the whole complexity of the postmodern world consists in one of those signs of the times that says something in our favor-- we have arrived at an historical moment in which the content of our charism finds fertile ground. Postmodernity is fertile ground for living as a Passionist. But how? In what sense?

The hypothesis is the following-- the new status that legitimizes postmodern style is not indifferent to the message of the


Crucified. This status, as already explained, is sustained by the fragility of its concepts and the fluidity of its meaning. It cannot be captured within a rational totality; on the contrary, it responds to a fragility which by itself already speaks the language of the contemporaries of postmodernity. It is not a merely rational explanation that is at stake, but the fragility of the Crucified One that is reflected in the way of life of the Passionist who inhabits this historical epoch.

The message of the cross is the statute that legitimizes the Passionist being in this context of postmodernity, because it is not proclaimed with strong categories. It has always been a scandal and folly (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). The Crucified One himself was at the mercy of the powerful; he did not react with violence; on the contrary, he opted for fragility through his kenosis. He gathered all his bitterness and suffering in a cry in which he questioned the Father about his abandonment (cf. Mk 15:34). He did not choose the way of life that would make him superior to others.

He renounced the temptation to power and girded himself with the apron of service (cf. Jn 13:4). In everything, the Crucified One lived his life from within the logic of fragility-- compassion, tenderness, welcome, listening, touching wounds, being moved by suffering. Doesn't this way of living history say a lot to our postmodern world, in which the radicality of witness counts more than abstract discourses?



Is Passionist formation possible without falling into the trap of abstraction that does not touch reality? Can formation be pluralistic? Can it assume the perspective of linguistic games, in which emerge the various styles of Passionist life already present in the cultures of the continents where we are located? Have these styles assumed an epistemological status in the very way of conceiving Passionist life?

The complexity of life is no longer answered with metaphysical objectivity, but in the fragile way of being Passionist, which makes the scandal of the Crucified One transparent in the various cultures where Passionists are present. 

Is Brazilian, born on May 29, 1987, in the state of Paraíba.

He made his religious profession in the Passionist Congregation on August 1st, 2012. Ordained as a priest on January 9, 2016.

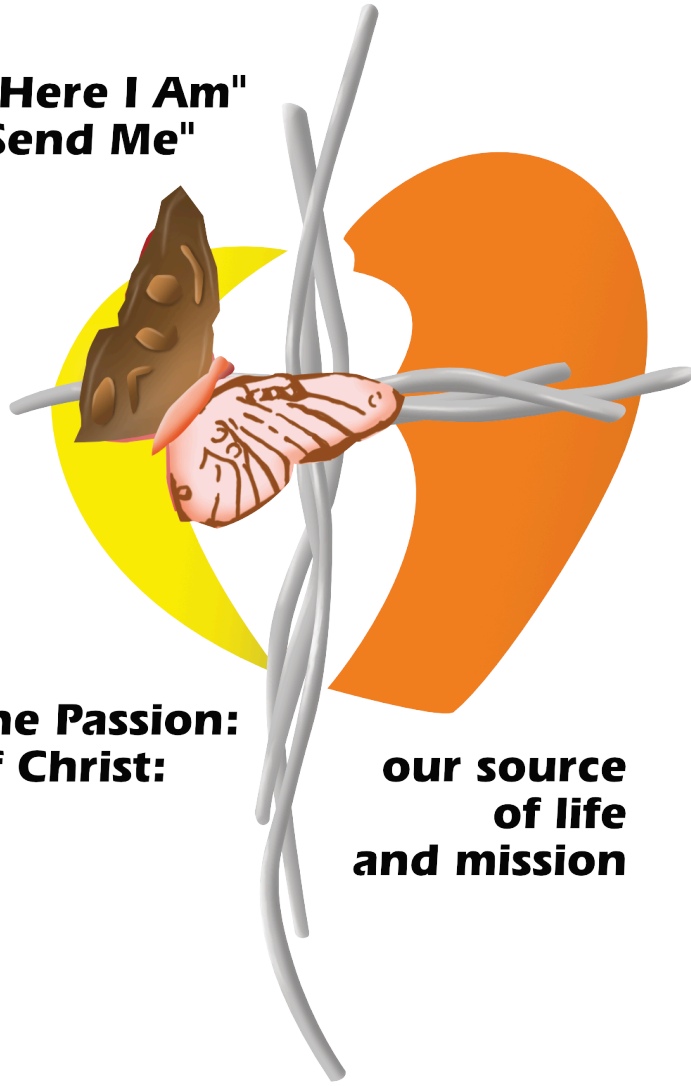
He obtained a licentiate in Fundamental Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and is currently a doctoral candidate at the same Pontifical University.

He is a member of the Gethsemane Province (CJC), São Paulo/Brazil.

**Fr. Ademir Guedes Azevedo, C.P.**



**"Here I Am"  
Send Me"**



**The Passion:  
of Christ:**

**our source  
of life  
and mission**

# **48<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**