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Internationality Re-examined

General Chapters are convoked. Chosen topics are introduced, discussed, debated and approved. Final, carefully worded documents are produced and made available to all members. The 1968-69 General Chapter produced a monumental document which contained, among other things, a novel idea: internationality. Every Spiritan is invited to re-read it.

One of its results was that, in the 1970s, Foundations sprang up, with interculturalization (another name for internationality) as their trademark. Ventures into international teams were initiated. The North Americans took a bold step in experimenting with an international novitiate, and their daring is yielding fruit. International meetings have been convened with considerable success.

Yet internationality remains problematic, misunderstood and largely unaccepted. The notion breeds fear and suspicion. It unsettles our older Provinces, whose preoccupation is to guard their autonomy as Provinces. The Southern Hemisphere confreres feel threatened with deracination. Their identity is at stake. This I/D would like to re-examine internationality: "*The unexamined life is not worth living*" (Socrates).

The present world view

The world is on the threshold of a new era, an era of global unity. Evidence of this is the constant recurrence in press, radio, television and summit conferences of terms like: dialogue, solidarity, interdependence, partnership, joint interests, equality, mutual respect, shared planet, a global community, a global vision, power sharing and their synonyms. The conclusion is that global problems will not be resolved unless they are addressed by most, if not all, nations working together. We are, as it were, in ascension, moving towards new heights. No longer within a particular small culture, a provincial culture, perhaps a ghetto culture, we have become citizens not only of a country but of the world — citizens, indeed, of the cosmos.

Our Spiritan family

Our panorama ranges over five continents. The Congregation was born in Europe and until recently was heavily European. In this continent the Congregation has ten Provinces. In North America there are four Provinces. The Spiritan presence in South America started in 1885. Trinidad was a District as far back as 1863. The continent of Africa is the Congregation's first love. She matured the Spiritan family. Two Provinces, sixteen Districts, four Groups and three Foundations are eloquent testimony of what the continent did for the Congregation and vice versa. The Indian Ocean Islands (Madagascar, Reunion, Mauritius) meant a great deal to the Congregation in the early days of Blessed Jacques Laval and Fr. Le Vavasseur. Today, more than ever, they have a deep effect upon the Congregation. These islands have a common project in the Indian Ocean Foundation, which can become an opening towards Asia, as close relationships already exist between them and Asia.

Internationality: Are we prepared for it?

"*The Congregation has always had an international character*" (SL, 201). However, this character was not taken seriously enough throughout the history of the Congregation. Our traditional provincial system of training and missionary work obscured this. The thrust of our talk was in terms of *our* Province and *our* mission territories. Administrations and mission methodologies were as diverse as the number of Provinces. Now there is need to see ourselves in a different light. The Congregation must have in fact as well as in theory one membership in which every Spiritan sees his basic and most profound membership as that of his international Congregation. Provinces and Districts must no longer be seen as independent countries with their own nationality, their own naturalization process and their own missions.

Internationality : Why?

The rumblings of internationality are heard here and there in the Congregation today because "*the old order changeth, giving place to the new*". It is likely that the new Spiritan will be working with Spiritans of other nationalities than his own, partly because numbers are small in our scholasticates and large groups of the same language or nation are rarely possible, and partly because large national blocs are no longer desirable in many missionary situations (EGC 1976, Gen. Bull. 776, pp. 213-214). And, what is more, "*the problems of today's world can only be solved when all forces are joined together and directed towards the same common aim*" (Pope John Paul II).

This call to internationality arises :

a) From the signs of the times

In the political, economic and academic world, associations and conferences have mushroomed, aimed at stressing the growing awareness of our interdependence, for example : A New International Economic Order (NIEO).

"*In view of these developments it is evident that no single state can properly pursue its own interests and perfection in isolation. The prosperity and progress of each state is part cause and part effect of the prosperity and progress of every other state*" (Pope John Paul II). The signs of the times force us to think globally and internationally, even when acting on a local level. His Holiness has warned that "*religious communities have a special responsibility to be sensitive to the signs of the times and to try to meet such needs as are the proper concern of the Church's ministry.*"

b) From the Church

The documents of the Second Vatican Council state that "*one of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development very largely promoted by modern technical advances*" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 23; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13 and 23; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 19; *Inter Mirifica*, 22; and *Ad Gentes*, 41). "*Nations try harder every day to bring about a kind of universal community*" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 9).

Thus arises the need for internationality. Because "*present-day relationships between peoples and between nations demand the establishment of greater international cooperation. . . the more powerful a nation is, the greater becomes its international responsibility. . .*" (Pope John Paul II). Consequently, the social teachings of the Church call us to greater interdependence and a sense of global responsibility and international collaboration in society and in the Church.

c) From within the Congregation

The writings of our Venerable Father, directives of our General Chapters and recent documents from the General Administration call attention to internationality. Fr. Libermann originally thought of foundations of his society outside of France "*so that a wider scope of influence might be attained*". He dreamt of foundations in Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Spain

and Portugal. "*It would have been international in character with a combined missionary and educational aim*" (Koren).

The prime mover in the new international awareness after so many years of provincialism was the Chapter of 1968-69. It affirmed that "*it is desirable to set up international teams. . . To facilitate the formation of such international teams, Provinces should be ready to make appointments to Spiritan missions other than their own*" (CDD, 383).

This was again taken up in 1974 : "*Men have become conscious of being fellow-citizens of One World and feel responsible for what happens anywhere in it. In these circumstances the Holy Spirit seems to be asking us to respond positively to the special missionary needs of our times by becoming men of worldwide vision and by making stronger the international character of our Institute*" (GA, 25).

This Chapter mandated the Generalate to "*continue to cooperate with Provinces and Districts in the setting up of international teams*" (GA, 27).

Internationality came up again in the 1976 Enlarged General Council. Some of its resolutions were :

- " — *The General Council and the Major Superiors bind themselves to make the confreres more aware of the reasons why internationality is today more necessary than ever before.*
- *The presence in the same circumscription of confreres of different Provinces is one of the forms of internationality which we should further encourage.*
- *When the exigencies of a missionary situation require an international team, the General Council will come to an understanding with the Major Superiors so that they will put suitable confreres at its disposition*" (Gen. Bull. 776, p. 213).

I/D No. 12 (Sept. 1977) attempted to explain "*why we feel that a greater opening to internationality is necessary for the Congregation if it is to adapt to changing times. We are at a moment of great change in the world, and therefore in mission*".

These, however, remain mere words. Internationality was, and is still, considered by many a Pandora's box. In 1980, the Superior General was emboldened to say in the name of his Council : "*When we say 'internationality', we are speaking about getting beyond the frontiers and limits of nations and cultures. This translates itself into a close collaboration between circumscriptions, into co-responsibility in the whole gamut going from sincere interest in others to international teams, and through a whole series of variations*" (Report to 1980 Chapter, Suppl. to Gen. Bull. 776, p. 60).

Despite our willingness to implement these decisions and mandates, internationality continues to hang over our heads like the sword of Damocles. In the 1980 General Chapter, it featured again. Not satisfied with making it essential in formation (SL, 201-205) and a constitutive element in the makeup of the General Council, it empowered the Superior General and his Council to "*appoint personnel to a work which by its very nature requires international personnel*" (SL, 228). The leitmotiv nature of internationality in the documents of the Congregation since 1968 is therefore very observable and makes it now an important aspect of our Spiritan life.

Internationality : Obstacles

In the interest of developing this global consciousness, a truly lived internationality can be a visible sign of the kingdom, a genuine expression of the possibility of peoples coming together as brothers. Fear and scepticism, however, have made many Spiritans hesitant in the pursuance of this.

(a) These arise, firstly, from our shortsighted localism. We do not see why our time, attention and energy, already so heavily taxed, should be diverted to consider other problems which, if not less real, have apparently little bearing on the reality in which we work, and remain out of our reach and influence. In this context, internationality may appear to us to be something utopian, a kind of escapism from the demands that concrete situations place on us.

No doubt, there is some danger of running away from concrete local realities and taking refuge in a vaguely defined international apostolate. But then we cannot forget the international nature of the Spiritan vocation of putting ourselves "*in manu Superiorum parati ad omnia; ubicumque pauperibus et infidelibus evangelizare, munia ecclesiastica infima et laboriosa, pro quibus ministri difficillime reperiuntur, non modo suscipere, sed etiam toto corde amare ac prae caeteris eligere*" (Regulae, 3).

The standard of living of the peasants in Paraguay is one of the lowest in the whole of South America. The Marwari are the poorest and most neglected in Pakistan. They have no status or privilege and are untouchables, outcasts. Conditions in Angola are very trying, even unnerving. The Manjaks in Guinea-Bissau are "*a people in migration*". "*An important cause of their migration is their poverty, exploitation by colonialists, insecurity and lack of the bare minimum for survival*" (Pentecôte sur le Monde, No. 152). The Indians of Mexico have been described as the "*poorest of the poor*". Definitely these constitute "*munia ecclesiastica infima et laboriosa*".

With respect to these, all of us, wherever we are and whatever we do, have to express somehow the international character of our vocation. The Superior General has repeatedly enjoined on us "*to think Congregation before Province*". When we enter the Congregation, strictly speaking we do not join a particular Province, Foundation or District, but the *corpus universale societatis*. We are directly called to be "*parati ad omnia: ubicumque pauperibus et infidelibus evangelizare*".

(b) A second obstacle comes from excessive emphasis on the pastoral needs of our Province or District. We certainly have apostolic responsibilities towards our own Province, Foundation, District or culture and towards our own local Churches but this should not make us forget our Spiritan commitment to the more universal good of mankind and of the Church.

"*We should not get so involved in local tasks that we are unable to think of any other need which does not directly fall under our concrete responsibility here and now. Sometimes the comfortable feeling of being 'at home' among people who know and understand us, the sense of security that a permanent job or working contract provide, greatly diminish our apostolic freedom and mobility, and our interest and concern for broader issues and problems*" (Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J.).

Internationality : What it means for us

Internationality would therefore mean a close solidarity and a more generous sharing of our material and human resources to satisfy apostolic needs, wherever these needs are greater and more urgent. Internationality is vitally necessary for meeting the needs and problems that are not local in nature, but common to all Provinces, Foundations and Districts. At Carcavelos, a participant described internationality as "*openness to all cultures*". At Saverne, the formators, among other preferred descriptions, called it "*an openness to living and working with people of different cultures and mentality when and where the needs of the apostolate demand it*". Internationality could be summed up as an attitude of availability for the universal Church as a sacrament of unity.

Our present endeavours

International meetings

Our international gatherings, General Chapters, Enlarged General Councils of Rome, Knechtsteden and Carcavelos, the Young Spiritan meetings of Aranda and Gentinnes and the formators' meetings in Rome and Saverne have had the same result: "*a sacred communion*". These meetings have been strongly characterized by a sense of community and prayerful communitarian discernment of God's will. Spiritans from different cultural backgrounds and experiences, speaking different languages, came together as brothers to speak one common language: the charism of our Founders in today's Church-in-the-world. Such meetings foster a greater awareness of internationality and leave one with a feeling of "*it is good for us to be here*" (Mk 9 : 5), and "*it is great to be a Spiritan*".

International teams ("*Teams made up of members from different Provinces have been set up*", SL, 45.)

A few excerpts from reports will show the courage, missionary spirit and difficulties of our confreres who are living and working in international teams :

PAKISTAN (1977) : "*The call of Pakistan is a truly missionary situation that conforms pre-eminently with our traditional aims, as few other missionary situations do. . . Our conclusion is a resounding Yes to our involvement in Pakistan, but with at least three strong teams*" (Report by Fr. Gross after Visit, Dec. 1981)

PARAGUAY (1967) : "*The international structure of the team is not questioned by any of them. They all accept it and even ask that the group at Lima, where there are only French confreres, should be internationalized*" (Report by Fr. Torres Neiva after Visit, Dec. 1981).

International collaboration is also taking place in ANGOLA (1977) under very trying conditions, GUINEA-BISSAU (1980), ZAMBIA (1982), SOUTHERN AFRICA, ETHIOPIA and MEXICO. All these teams are in need of expansion.

International teams : Caveats

• Improvisation should be avoided in the constitution of an international team. Time should be taken to choose the members carefully

- Dominance of one culture and language should also be avoided.
- Language is unitive as well as divisive and alienating. A multinational team should agree on a common language, preferably the language of the place. Linguistic aptitude is absolutely necessary.
- Avoid too much dispersion. It is a danger to one's sanity and the development of a genuine religious life.
- Some international teams are directly under the Generalate, e.g. Pakistan and Paraguay. Others are the result of inter-Provincial collaboration, which creates problems on the plane of obedience: "*I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos*" (1 Cor. 3:4). This collaboration is devoid of focus since Provinces have diverse and divergent missionary methods. What are the powers of Provincials as regards international teams? What is their status?

How do we achieve internationality?

"The formation of every Spiritan should include an element of internationality" (SL, 202).

The 1968-69 General Chapter was categorically opposed to an international scholasticate (CDD, 352). The 1982 summer meeting of formators at Saverne strongly supported this Chapter stipulation. The 1980 precapitular responses show that the vast majority of the responses indicated agreement that we should in some way internationalize our formation. The question remains as to *how* this should be accomplished. Definitely not by creating a homogeneous and monolithic system of formation. Our heterogeneity has to be preserved. However, efforts to internationalize formation can be made by insistence on:

- The learning of other languages. "*Language is a big stumbling block*" to internationality (cf. SL, 204).
- A part of theological study, at least a one-year experience, in an international setting. This would be a way to develop a sense of internationality in young Spiritans.
- An international centre, or centres, for theological formation (CDD, 352; SL, 205). "*Pastoral centres in Duquesne, Kimmage etc. should be enlarged rather than begin new centres*" (Saverne meeting, 1982).
- More meetings of the Aranda/Gentines type on themes pertaining to Spiritan life. These should be serious and deep. Their success should not be judged by their euphoric atmosphere. Concrete and workable decisions must be taken.
- Exchanges of students between Province and Province and between Foundations and Provinces. Exchange here does not mean paternalism. It does not rest on the plane of helping. A big Province taking two or three students from a young Province or Foundation is not exchange. Exchange means that Ireland and Nigeria, the East African Foundation and France,

or the United States, Brazzaville and Angola can interchange students on an equal basis. This is a way of fostering internationality. This exchange should be for apostolic work as well as studies.

- Students getting a chance of living a missionary experience outside their Province of origin. The same manner of acting as in exchange applies here. It is a two-way traffic.

Action!

"Mission today asks us to abandon self-sufficiency" (SL, 48).

The call of internationality demands of all of us sacrifice, self-emptying and conversion. This conversion is born of:

(a) **Raising our consciousness** to an awareness that we belong to an international group. As Spiritans our consciousness is global.

(b) **Conscience deepening.** This requires an examination of our mind set.

(1) Is our *vision* a world vision? Do we have a global sensitivity?

(2) What kind of *witness* do we bear in a divided world? Do we witness to unity in diversity? Is our witness to internationality (in living and not just in work) something which people genuinely recognize in us?

(c) **Confidence building.** Confidence comes from *vision* because vision generates hope, that virtue whose presence or absence determines in this case, in the last analysis, whether we choose internationality or not.

Conclusion

"Stand together and act together."

"There are many needs of the apostolate... which you cannot meet adequately unless you stand together and act together" (Pope John Paul II).

This is the thrust of the appeal for internationality. To act internationally, we need to be international: *agere sequitur esse.*

Sympathy, collaboration and availability are imperative if the Congregation would be abreast of our fast changing times. "*We must try something. It is by trying for a few years that we come to a deep knowledge of the Divine Will for the work we are undertaking. We begin by giving it a form of its own*" (Fr. Libermann, 1842, N.D. IV, 177).

Some Congregations have gone beyond this stage. They are more preoccupied now with inter-Congregational collaboration. For us Spiritans, at any rate, the mandate to internationality is clear, though its realization may be complex. It is up to each of us to try to broaden our horizons.

THE GENERALATE TEAM