What is the Holy Spirit Telling Us From Asia?

Jean-Pascal Lombart
I offer three complementary approaches to this question. They are based on my limited experience in Asia: in Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines and China. I have never been to Pakistan or India, to Australia or Papua New Guinea, so additional light should come from those places too.

**Globalization of the Kingdom of God?**

There are 40 countries in Asia, from Israel to Japan, including Taiwan! Their cooperation is increasing in a globalized world. The two giants, India and China, count for one-third of the world population. China’s increasing presence should be of interest to all the Spiritans, as China claims to invent a new model of relationship with Africa where its influence is growing. How can this relationship be mutually beneficial, and what are the challenges ahead? Here are a few questions.

How will each partner country involve its people in the decisions and the accruing benefits, and remain in solidarity with near and distant neighbors in the new multipolar environment? As members of a global and multipolar congregation, do we have anything to contribute? Another question is this: can our Spiritan circumscriptions be prophetic enough in their mutual relationships in solidarity, responsibility, and transparency so as to allow the diversity of charisms to benefit the common good and our communion?

Looking at the patterns of business and migration, it can be said that mutual exchanges between China and Africa are more and more obvious on both sides. In our own congregation, there already thirty African confreres out of the fifty Spiritans in Asia. We have about 20 Asians in formation and some Vietnamese members of the US Province. Our international communities bear witness that the Kingdom of God extends beyond borders, but our struggles in the Union of Circumscriptions call for further reflection on centralization and decentralization. Our efforts could inspire the host societies to become more respectful, in solidarity and cooperation. In Taiwan, a program of International Volunteers (founded by a Spiritan) has already sent a hundred young people to Tanzania in the past five years. Back home, these youths share their experiences with and influence their own people. Our reflections on the organization of the congregation should keep as a background the question: “How does God call
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nations to organize their solidarity in the XXIst century?” This should also be a primary reference question for the initiation of young confreres to a prophetic life for the Kingdom of God.

Localization of the Kingdom of God?

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Asia is mostly Asian, but Christians are often a marginal minority in their own country and culture. Religions are sometimes considered with suspicion by political regimes, especially those which do not respect freedom of conscience and of association. In these situations, Spiritans must invest in a manner of being yeast in the dough. We must both try to be prophetic and stand on the side of the poor and oppressed, while at the same time try to insert ourselves in the culture and establish a lasting presence, where and when the laws of the country allow. From this emerge three questions.

How do we support the development of a democratic culture, responsible for the common good and for the poor in the countries where we are sent? Can we dare be more creative in handing on our charism, so that people of all walks of life in society can receive it and become agents of a localization of the Kingdom of God in their country and culture? Will our charism become truly incarnate in the local church, making it open it to its responsibility for mission if we do not receive local vocations?

Our presence in Asia is recent and limited; it allows us the freedom to risk a simpler lifestyle, relying more on local people. It nevertheless implies sacrificing some of our securities for the sake of the greater transparency of the message which we bring and embody. The Christian minorities are the first witnesses for this message, and we have a duty to pass on to them our expertise in intercultural dialogue, justice and peace in the ways of Jesus. This is great stuff, Good News! But in order to pass it on, we have to become Asians with the Asians, as servants to them as our masters for our whole life.

Internalization of the Kingdom of God: “Blessed are the Poor!”

We often meet Christians and others who search for a much deeper spiritual life. Peace and harmony are sought inside societies that are always more materialistic and superficial, while many forms of poverty coexist. The Good News of Jesus Christ has something to offer in this quest. Our spirituality
of availability to the Holy Spirit is attractive to people, Fr. Libermann’s teaching too. But are we well prepared to set on a spiritual journey with others where good questions are more important than good answers? Are we available to live closer to the poor and thus become a bit more marginal than the diocesan clergy? Too often, soon after ordination, we are put in a position of authority rather than of witness through humble service, with the risk that we may forget our own poverties and the gratitude to be loved as we are. Hence the following three questions.

How can we open a space for questions coming from within, from confreres and from our Asian friends, so as to set out on the way of an authentic spiritual experience? Do we have the resources in our Spiritan way of life, especially in community life, to live this conversion and attract those who search for life in the Holy Spirit? Do our young confreres receive sufficient formation in Spiritan history and spirituality so that these will become a priority reference for our collaboration with others in mission?

Our communities are threatened with death and scattering. But when we manage to live intercultural collaboration, others are inspired by our witness, and the local church asks us for this contribution above any other kind of ministry. The treasure of Trinitarian life revealed by Jesus and given by the Holy Spirit is the model of a communion respectful of differences and opened to a larger community. Our missionary heart must burn with the desire to introduce our friends to this life. The slums of Cebu and the mountains of Digkilaan in Philippines, the orphanages and poor families in Vietnam, the prisons of Taiwan, the villages of Marwari Bheels in Pakistan and the aborigines of Australia are places where our confreres in Asia give a wonderful witness of self-emptying as did the Son of God. The Trinitarian model of internalization of the Kingdom of God in religious and apostolic multicultural communities is also very relevant for the localization of the Kingdom and its globalization.

**Mission**

There are thirty to forty million Chinese outside their country, twenty million Indians, and eight million Filipinos. They carry far away their spiritual quest, while being released from the socio-cultural constrains of the homeland. Often, they turn to the Church in their adopted country to pursue this quest. They are more available, and some confreres have shared this with me. Confreres in Taiwan are happy to prepare some
bilingual Chinese texts to break the ice, and the hospitality of our Christian communities will lead to an experience of mutual spiritual enrichment. May the Asian century be an occasion for our Congregation, and indeed for the whole Church, to draw from the wellsprings which the Holy Spirit has raised among the peoples of Asia.

Jean-Pascal Lombart, C.S.Sp.