

Formula for Conquest

Many aspects of the Legion go beyond mere nature. But we are so seasoned to them that we take them as a matter of course. I think it is St Augustine who has pointed out that we are overwhelmed by the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes in the desert, but do not reflect that God is doing the same all the time through his multiplication of the seeds which produce the crops of the world. Similarly it is not perceived as a wonder that good legionary memberships persevere through the years; or that the crosses which bow down others are beneficial to legionaries; and that they keep their youth better than others; that Legion marriages are universally successful.

Likewise we take it for granted that our gatherings will be unsegregated, fraternal and happy. We do not realise that this is a grace; for in worldly assemblies those agreeable aspects are not common. It is argued that alcohol is a necessary social ingredient because without it people are mournful in each other's company. Definitely that does not hold in legionary circumstances where good humour flows without such stimulation.

Similarly we let our eyes pass unobservantly over the expansion of the spiritual in every legionary. This is accompanied by a growth in personality and in the natural qualities. Entrust the ordinary legionaries with tasks which are beyond the ordinary capacity and it will be found that they are carried through with competence. We see nothing unusual in all that. Is not Mary the perfect mother? The legionaries have given themselves to her and she has been magnificently responsive to them.

That much is encouraging. Now we have to think about the world which is not consoling to look at. Its spiritual state is little removed from chaos. It looks as if the Legion is among the few on whom the Church can count. So we must stiffen up our souls to what that entails. We must think in terms of higher standards, giving more and courageous venturing.

Divine Power at Our Disposal

In the handbook the rather explosive idea is placed before us of the praesidium being a Presence of Mary. Of course the same would apply to any body of legionaries working together on a particular task. The claim is made that through that group Mary can be stationed in a place or a problem and as a consequence her all-powerful operation is set in motion. Something has to happen, not necessarily at once or in the manner that we ought to expect but at the right time and in greater measure than we could hope for; because the divine bounty must always surpass the human expectation.

This prospect of being able to mobilise omnipotence is vastly intriguing and stimulating. But is it true? It sounds fantastic!

No. It is a simple re-statement of the Gospel insistence that the divine power is at the disposal of those who ask for it in the proper way; that is in strong faith and in the fullness of action. Remember some of the strange utterances of scripture on this subject. For example, Our Lord's promise to remove a physical mountain at the bidding of unshaking faith. Also his statement that his disciples would reproduce his own miracles. The fulfilment of those promises is proved by history. St Gregory Thaumaturgus directed his firm faith against a mountain and it yielded to him. Other saints, and to a particular degree, St Vincent Ferrer, paralleled all the miracles worked by Our Lord during his earthly career, including the raising of the dead.

The Mystical Body is a continuation of Our Lord's earthly life. Of that new body Our Lord is the head and Mary is the heart. Its power is no less than that of Jesus's actual body, so that with the same confidence that Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was grievously ill, may we plead today: 'Lord, this place which Thou lovest is sick' (John 11:3). By our faith every place of need in the world can be summoned and even the dead raised. Or into a Cana where recourse can be had to Mary our Mother with the result that common cold water can be turned into glowing wine.

Faith Must Not Waver

The dearest child of faith is a miracle says Goethe. But when invoking Our Lord's promise that faith will bring forth a miracle, we must not overlook his imperative proviso: our faith must be unwavering. This points to a faith of rich quality, surpassing the common faith which does not move mountains and which hardly moves

ourselves. So the decisive condition is that the faith shall be unwavering, unshaking. But in order that we may not seem to make it unattainable, let us content ourselves with saying that it must be heroic.

Moreover it must not be thought that even heroic faith suffices by itself. The queenly virtue of faith must always be attended by a retinue of other qualities. If we challenge the impossible, we must marshal every asset we possess. It is not enough to push ahead resolutely. We must also think along the way because it is the highest natural contribution we can make. And surely everyone can bestow industry, patience, care. It is the business of the praesidium to make sure that they are added in.

Now let us inspect more closely that Presence of Mary formula. It has extreme value as reducing to practical politics all that I have been saying. It contains the fullness of the supernatural principle and it secures the sort of action which applies that principle to the objective. It overcomes the doubting which so often neutralises good intention. It prevents us from standing helplessly where we cannot see a way. It enforces action even though it may have to begin as a symbolic gesture. Above all else, it turns procedure into an exercise of Mary's motherhood which lifts what we do into another order.

Victory Through Mary

All this is compressed into the simple formula which says: Confront the seeming impossibility with a praesidium. Certainly that remedy is short and sweet, but is it sensible? Justification is required, so I proceed to supply it:

Our Blessed Lady, that woman of history, that all-purpose person whose many roles are set out in her litanies, is above all else the mother, made for that by

the Holy Trinity. St Augustine terms her the fruit of the eternal deliberation. She is necessarily the infinitely perfect mother, first of Jesus and then of all men, even of those who do not know her, as declared by the council. They have all been given to her to mother. Her will to do that very thing is no less than her will to mother Jesus: the one is a prolongation of the other, as the tree is to the root.

But there is this difference. In receiving and mothering the Lord her action was unfettered. It was completely attuned to her faith and her will. So far as we can see, it did not depend on any other elements. She said 'Fiat' and the work was done: God was made flesh in her. Her upbringing of her child was not less in quality. We could not by any stretch of the imagination conceive her as falling short in any particular. She gave to her beloved son all that even he, the Divine One, could hope to receive, because the Holy Spirit co-operated in her mothering and he continues to do so with the same infinitude in that new phase of her mothering which concerns all mankind.

Failure Can Occur

But things are a little different today in regard to those new children of hers. She has not her full will in regard to them. She yearns with all her nature to give them everything and to develop them fully, but their own will can stand between and counter hers, and may finally resist.

There is another factor which is uncertain. It is that now Our Lady like Our Lord himself works through the Mystical Body. As the handbook says, if she had her own will fully, she would convert all mankind in a trice. But under the present dispensation she has to assert her

motherhood through human agencies. We are her limbs, her eyes, her ears, her tongue. Our help is necessary to her and this is where a fatal disjunction can occur. We can leave her deprived in that way. We can betray our Christian condition which requires our active help.

The popes and of late the council have laid it down in no uncertain manner that every Catholic must be apostolic in some way, and apparently not even the very busy or the infirm are exempt from this obligation. In spite of all that, the vast majority of persons are deaf to the call. So far as they are concerned Mary's motherhood is frustrated.

The Theory behind the Praesidium

With what exultancy, therefore, does she avail of those who do offer their services to her! As St Louis Marie de Montfort quaintly describes it, she puts herself around about them and she accompanies them like an army in battle array. Through them she puts forth the wonders of her maternity. What is the extent of that maternity? What are its limits? The answer is that there are no limits because she has been made part of the divine dispensation. That mothering of hers is conjoined to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She is his co-worker. All that he gives to her she passes on to those who place themselves at her disposal. To the extent that we co-operate, she gives us everything. She is bound to do so by the very character of her motherhood, and alas, the fewness of the helpers.

The praesidium, or any other legionary group working together, is attuned to that co-operation. It tries to enact in deeds what it declares in words. 'I am all yours. My Queen and my Mother, and all that I have is yours.' It understands to some reasonable extent what is her role in

grace and how powerful she is. This provides the affinity with her which enables her to accomplish her maternal function. Of course the more the legionaries advance in understanding of her and the more they give her, the better is she able to project herself through them. It follows that if she were to receive a plenary co-operation from the Mystical Body, the conversion of the world and the solution to its problems would be on its way.

I have been talking in terms of principles and theory. Can evidence be offered that this works in practice? Yes, I think we can give sufficient evidence. The common working of every praesidium affords it in a modern fashion; that is in its persevering in the carrying out of tiring, unpleasant and often difficult work. It can point to the awakening of faith and the restoration of people to grace.

Practice May Fall Short

These things may look simple but they are not natural and should not be taken for granted. The significant fact is that the Legion is achieving that, whereas average and even intellectual Catholicism is not. The Legion is presenting the ingredient of apostleship demanded by the council, while the body of Catholics are not. That is proof positive of a superior force moving in the Legion.

Admittedly that much by itself does not possess the aspect of conquest, and it is the latter that we are here discussing. Carlyle has said impossibility is not a lucky word and that no good comes of those who often have it in their mouth. He means that it is like an opiate to those who are addicted to it. It paralyses their power to act. Of course most impossibilities are of our own making through lack of sufficient trying. But there are genuine

impossibilities and it is to the overcoming of these that I apply the word 'conquest'.

Despite its fidelity and its supernatural behaviour, the ordinary praesidium is not aiming at true conquest. So to speak, it is working on the ground floor. It is not attempting what it regards as beyond its capacity. It is not issuing a challenge to the recognised impossibilities. Therefore it does not put in a claim for that miraculous intervention of Our Lady. She will only enter in, in that eminent fashion where the best we can do is not enough and where we throw ourselves on our knees in utter trust.

Some Striking Examples

Previously I have said that we have cases which fully qualify as conquest. Actually, I would suggest that they are plentiful enough but very often veiled and unspectacular, so that one has to probe the circumstances to recognise that nature has been exceeded. The majority of the legionary conquests are as unassuming as Mary herself.

I give a few instances.

- I start by placing in that category the opening and the continued existence of the Morning Star and Regina Coeli Hostels, Dublin. I would judge that these domiciles for the derelict constitute exploits far beyond mere human effort. Their beginnings were acts of pure faith. With voluntary staffs and without resources, they faced problems universally regarded as unhandleable. The sequel was the creation of institutions which are unique. I would claim that they are incomparably the most remarkable things of their kind in the entire world. The conquest which began in their coming into being has maintained itself. The fiftieth anniversary of each impends. But the old

proverb holds: familiarity has bred contempt in the sense that it is not perceived that the conquest is still going on there. Is not the standing miracle the higher form?

- The Late Night Picket (street contact) in Dublin, directed to both men and women: This is now regarded as routine but again I suggest that what is happening is outside unaided human reach. The explanation is that Our Lady walks with and talks through the devoted band which exhibits such faith and love. Imagine: it is not uncommon that a dozen men thus encountered go there and then to Confession.
- Skid Row, Chicago: The opening up was sensational, the carrying on is now but a legionary chore, but it fits precisely into that higher classification. One praesidium is entirely devoted to the place. Mass is said there weekly and is well attended. Human wreckage avails eagerly of the sacraments.

I could add to that to that list but I must go on to wonders of a different kind. I specify some miracles of conversion.

- The Philippines, where in a single generation a non-practicing generation was brought to practice: The archbishop under whom that epic was accomplished spoke wondrous words about it, which must not be forgotten for they set a headline for conquest for the wide world. He said: 'So great has been the transformation effected in the Philippines by the Legion of Mary that it is like the difference between darkness and the light, between the hopeless and the hopeful. So great has it been that I have been emboldened to dream dreams, and one of those dreams has been to say to myself: "This is the only

Catholic nation in the Orient. Why should it not convert the Orient?"'

- Yengema in Sierra Leone, where in the teeth of prophesies of dire disaster 27 African legionaries went to a community of 40,000 Moslems, and proposed Catholicism to them. Result: a kindly reception followed by 421 persons giving in their names for instruction.
- Bentley Place where something was brought to pass which seems to be unparalleled in religious history; that is the almost total conversion of a world-famous evil district which consequently remained good.
- The entry of the Peregrinatio into Russia and the general circumstances of its unimpeded work there. I contend that this is an open miracle which dots the i's and crosses the t's of everything I have been suggesting.
- Through custom we have become almost casual about the wonders which are being accomplished through the Peregrinatio over the world. It is coming on to adult status in the sense that soon all the countries will have taken it up. At that stage we should be witnessing the effect of a universal deluge of grace.
- A child of the Peregrinatio has just arrived in the shape of the new proposition, the *Exploratio Dominicalis*. This may be translated as the Sunday Search for souls. It aims at bringing the challenge and spirit of the PPC into the normal legionary round. It is evident that only a proportion of the legionaries will be able to undertake the PPC because of the greatness of the demand which it makes. The Exploratio may be called a mini-Peregrinatio. It asks for what is in the power of almost every legionary to give. It proposes that at least

on one Sunday in the year each praesidium should undertake the adventure of going to some problem place at a distance from itself to devote the day to working there. The time spent in travelling should not absorb an undue proportion of the time available.

And now I give some examples in a different order; that is where the Presence of Mary avails to effect economic and social restoration under the auspices of True Devotion to the Nation (TDN).

- Inchigeela, Co. Cork was the first demonstration of the value of that method. A sleepy little hamlet without a prospect of better was wakened up to prosperity.
- A further and more dramatic manifestation was afforded in the case of Tuosist, Co. Kerry. The circumstances there were of such a purely miraculous character as to show that it was not only the case of a true Presence of Mary, but also that it was intended as a pattern for all similarly circumstanced places. It has not been accepted as a lesson. Other places in like predicament have not taken pattern and prefer to languish. One cannot but think that if those successes were won under the name of some non-religious movement with a pretentious jargon name, every place would waken up to interest.

I add some comments in regard to this unusual work of TDN. Neither in regard to schemes under TDN nor in regard to any other legionary enterprises, should we content ourselves with things which are obviously within our own human possibility. Such would allow no room for Mary's special action which will only be given as an extra to ours. She is not a substitute for us but a supplement. It is not

her purpose to take over any portion of what we can do ourselves. That would not be a benefit but a disservice to us. Where she comes in is to add to and embellish what we do offer. If what we offer is heroic in its character, she can amplify it to the point of accomplishing the impossible.

A further vital consideration is that TDN is not just another programme of economic uplift, but quite a special sort of movement. It is that stationing of Mary in a deprived situation and the giving to her of the opportunity of reviving the place in every possible way. It is pretty certain that the grave physical deficiencies will be accompanied by spiritual ones, by inadequacy in every direction. Mary's intervention could mean not only the provision for everyone of a modest economic sufficiency but also the inner development of each person. Finally, it should bring a spiritual expansion to the whole area.

Emphatically, TDN is not a socio-economic movement, though it enters modestly into that sphere. The spiritual note must predominate to the extent that the electricity predominates in the lamp, the motor in the car, the lens in the camera. If that main item is missing, the remainder of the appliance is without utility. In other words TDN reduced to the category of a material remedial effort, would be like the bulb without the light; an absurdity. Could legionaries foolishly imagine that any group of them is going of themselves to solve the material problems before which governments stand helpless. It is because it relies on the divine intervention that TDN ventures to think it will succeed where the great world agencies fail. I have mentioned a couple of cases where it did so succeed. I would like to hear of any government accomplishing like transformations with so little resources and with such suddenness.

Now, where dose all that leave us? Those dynamic achievements surely constitute, as I have already said, a pattern. And a pattern is for following. It will be noticed that they touch all aspects of human need and show that conquering graces as great as any in history can be elicited by suitable action. But legionaries are content to comfort and console, so the graces of conversion and conquest do not flow, although three and a half billion of people are perishing without them. The legionaries are not even going to those people, though so well equipped to do so. They have discipline and abundant faith but these are directed to the lesser needs.

This seems to point imperatively to a reorientation of Legion mentality which will put first things first and last things last. Jesus and Mary, as those dramatic examples prove, are willing to give torrential graces, including miracles where needed. But procedure must be along certain ordained lines: we must carry those graces to the endangered souls. We must have heroic faith and courage. Above all, the legionaries must get a lead.