

Some Peregrinatio Principles¹

The Peregrinatio pro Christo is engaged in a tremendous work and that work is succeeding. There has been a suggestion that we are not succeeding enough; that an annual increase of a couple of hundred in those going forth from here is not enough. But that would be a wrong test to apply, as if the Peregrinatio were no more than a local movement. The position is that the Peregrinatio idea is growing like the proverbial wildfire. A glance through our current world news shows its uprise in very many places. Like a shower of sparks, the idea has fallen widely, creating innumerable fires. Soon, I think, the world will have accepted the idea. Then something portentous would have taken place, i.e. that Christianity would have really implanted itself. For Christianity, truly understood, is not merely the acceptance of faith, but the accepting of it in such a way as to drive one forth to communicate it everywhere.

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So the image of an extending fire is the one which we must dwell on. The fire which extends is very soon everywhere. If the whole Catholic people were aflame to spread the Faith, it would in itself be an irresistible force. But it would be simply as nothing compared to what the Holy Spirit is going to build it up into. The Peregrinatio offers such prospects of awakening Catholics to their duty in this respect that it is certain to have immense things opposed to it. There will be natural difficulties and there will also be supernatural difficulties. By supernatural difficulties I mean that we must expect to have the powers of evil arrayed against it. These powers are great. Unquestionably they will exert themselves against the movement which possesses such possibility. If one considers, in addition, the mere difficulty of keeping the enthusiasm of people at its height, one is tempted to the pessimism that the movement will be brought to a standstill. There you have two opposites: the thought of growth and conquest and the fear that it is too good to be true. The latter would be a calamity. So much would have been accomplished during the time of head-long advance. But infinitely more left undone!

Therefore I am going to direct myself to some central ideas. Our chief danger, as in every high enterprise, would lie in vague principles, so that darkness or obstructions could divert the movement from its true path. We have to be deadly sure of what we are aiming at in order to steer through obstacles and confusion. At times it may seem that we have to force our way through a very mountain.

The Peregrinatio must be conceived as a frontal approach to those without faith, proposing to them the Church in its fullness and seeking their adhesion to it. It must be a reflection of Our Lord's global commandment.

I cannot feel that it would justify a Peregrinatio project to aim at a mere fraternity with other religions. Our contact with each individual is so momentary, perhaps never to be renewed, that we can only offer the shortest summary of our purpose which is a blunt proposing of the Catholic Church. It sounds ecumenical that we should suggest to lapsed Protestants that they return to their own churches. If they did so, it might represent a rekindling of faith. But in the short period of a Peregrinatio venture, there is no time to be anything but immediate.

Neither should we - and this is vital - propose a watered-down Catholicity. This is a worldwide peril at the present moment, as is painfully evident from the papers. Certain people, intending to make the Church approvable to those outside, are toning down and tampering with its principal doctrines.

So the Peregrinatio must represent the getting down to first principles. The biggest of these is Faith. The powerful but passing drive of the Peregrinatio is essentially a work of Faith. By its aid alone do we face and argue with absolute unbelief for so short a spell and without much chance of seeing eventual results. So I begin with a mighty consideration from St Augustine.

He tells us that the heart of man is made for God and is restless until it finds repose in him. This restlessness can drive people after everything except the right things, because if people do not know God, then they cannot seek him, and their fermenting desires find outlet in every other direction, usually in the wrong ways. We would see in that thought of the great saint the main driving power for the Peregrinatio. We must believe that in each human being is that yearning after God. But it will remain an unconscious yearning until it is stirred

up. When the attempt is made to elicit it, it will, like the bell responsive to the blow, reply to a touch which we might call appropriate. How would I define 'appropriate'? I would say that it is a touch which contains God and which seeks to give him. Humanitarianism and a mere fraternity for their own sakes do not here qualify. They may contain little of the spiritual and they will inspire in hearts no more than they contain.

To give God must signify giving him in his fullness. That does not mean that we must talk about God or our ultimate aim in the first minute. We may have to curb ourselves. We may have to be very prudent. But in our hearts there must be the determination to give God in his fullness. This we cannot do except we present the Church, which affords the only explanation of God and his dealings with mankind. Other churches may teach some correct aspects of these things but they do so only as the moon sheds light; that is by a reflecting of light from its real source.

Only to the Church are available the supreme doctrines, the whole assembly of them. Were we to hold back on those doctrines, we would not be presenting either Christianity or God. And the final sequel would be barrenness. We must present Jesus Christ in his completeness; his divinity; his presence in the Eucharist, the Mass and the Mystical Body. We must present his relation with Mary and her motherhood of all men. These must not be obscured. In a hit-and-run enterprise like the *Peregrinatio* they cannot be explained fully, but they must not be deliberately held back for the sake of ingratiating ourselves.

Now I proceed to another basic. It is Our Blessed Lady. This has a special importance at this time. Some are found alleging that the council has played her down.

How this can be said after a reading of the *De Ecclesia* decree I do not understand. Because for the first time in its long history the Church has undertaken the task of putting itself down on paper. It calls that document the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church. Chapter 8, its last long chapter, like a culmination is devoted to the place of Mary. It is so strong that it reads almost like a paraphrase of the Legion handbook. That chapter is verily the Charter of Our Blessed Lady. In it she is styled Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. Adjutrix is only another expression for Co-Redemptrix. In regard to the use of the word 'Mediatrix,' some persons have sought to diminish it by saying that it is a reduction from the title Mediatrix of All Graces. Then we might ask is Our Lord himself reduced by being always styled Mediator?

Cardinal Newman has some wonderful pages in regard to the development of Christian Doctrine. He contends that the most finished presentation of any doctrine is no more than an amplification of what had always been there in germ. In other words the first Christians would not have had the niceties of doctrine all worked out in their minds the way that we have today. But in essence they had what we have. It is interesting to refer that thought to Our Lady's role as displayed by the council and see how it would tally with the first statement made to mankind of her relation to the salvation of the world. It was proclaimed in the first of all prophecies, made by God to the Serpent after the fall of our first parents. At that moment of ruin and despair, it held out hope; it promised Redemption. That prophecy (familiarly called the Protevangelium or First Gospel) begins with Our Lady and makes her the foundation of that future restoration. You should know it well for the words of it form the chain-border of your Tessera: 'I will set

enmities between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. She shall crush thy head.'

This subject would provide a most valuable examination at some length. But time presses and allows only the briefest presentation. As the enmities referred to are perpetual enmities, they point to the Immaculate Conception. That woman is moreover to be the Mother of the Redeemer and of all those united to him. Manifestly from the whole tone of the prophecy and the linking which is there made between woman and seed, she is to be his helper and co-operator. If she co-operates in the actual Redemption, she will necessarily play an analogous part in the total administration of graces; she will be Advocate and Mediatrix. It is he who wins salvation. But dependent on him, she has her own ordained and necessary part in all the mysteries of religion.

I would venture to say that these conclusions drawn from that prophecy are not only a fair but an inevitable deduction. What the council now teaches about her is contained like a germ in that prophecy. Just as the future ear of wheat is contained in the single grain. Such is the eminent place of Mary in the divine plan. Announced as its originating point, she would continue instrumental in it until its final fulfilment in the salvation of the last soul on Earth.

Thus high must rise our appreciation of her. We only give Mary to others in proportion to our own faith in her. If it is insufficient, we do not truly present her. Mention of her name is vain unless it be backed by a recognition of her role. She is not an obstacle in the way of conversion. God has appointed her to be the mother of all men on Earth. So man responds to mention of her just as he does to mention of God.

I repeat that we must go by principle in our approaches to people. A further principle is to believe in what Newman calls the victoriousness of truth. It has its own power apart from how we dress it up. It is contrary to that principle to accommodate Catholic doctrine to the varying circumstances of places and men. This has often been tried and it has never worked. The truth is single and inviolable.

Constantly it is alleged that if certain doctrines be not modified, conversions will not be obtained. Before accepting that suggestion, ascertain what attempt to convert has been made. The normal local judgement about every place whatsoever appears to be that conversion is impossible. On the strength of that no attempt is made by Catholics! In respect of every area I could quote persons who have been living there for many years; who had made no attempt to convert; but who then asserted it as their definite experience that the people were unconvertible and even unapproachable on the subject of religion. This continues to be perversely asserted in spite of the fact that wholesale and successful approaches have been made by the new sects.

In one such country, deemed to be totally atheist, our envoy there has shown a different picture. She has told us that every day she has tried to speak to ten different people about the Church. Interest is displayed, never a rebuff. Now the legionaries are doing what had been declared to be impossible. They have thrown themselves into that most difficult of works, street contact, and are finding universal receptivity.

You are aware of what the Peregrinatio has experienced over the last three years in other similarly unpromising fields. It has proved that almost everyone is wide open to

religious approach. This endorses that saying of St Augustine that human hearts are tied at their roots to God. No matter how we fall away from him; no matter how much those roots are covered up by ignorance or by sin, they are still bound to him. We can and must exploit that principle.

I quote the striking testimony of a London legionary who paid an extended visit to Russia. She was versed in the language. She asked of six hundred persons this question: 'What do you think of God?' The results of that question are summarised by her in a book which deals with the various answers given to her. Of necessity I must summarise, so I give you a composite answer: 'What do I think of God? Well, in the first place I have to say that I envy you your faith. If God existed, it would give a meaning to life which at present it has not got. Especially there is the question of suffering. What is it all about? Here we are born into a world without our consent and compelled to lead a difficult and usually an unhappy life. If we get together a few possessions, we are left only declining years and perhaps few of them to enjoy those things. What does it mean? Once again I have to say that I envy you your belief in God. But alas religion has been disproved by science.'

That represents a bringing together of 600 answers. Now look into the minds of those people. Cannot you see St Augustine's law asserting itself in them all? And on that principle you must go, no matter what hardness there may seem to be, no matter what absence of faith. Believe in that law and let it govern your tactics. It has been getting results where it has been applied by legionaries in whose hearts did reside a fullness of faith.

Science has done away with religion! This is the modern effective phrase. I would say that it has done more damage

than anything else to the cause of religion, because people accept it as true. They are mesmerised by the reference to science. So we must dwell a little on it. Can we establish a principle or approach to this subject which would be helpful?

The ascendancy of science in our lives is massive. We are living in its atmosphere. We are overwhelmed by its conquests. The unbelievable is being produced before us every day. Soon commercial planes will transport us at thirty-three miles per minute! A pound of fuel can drive a great ship around the world! Men have landed on the moon and have come back to tell us about it. What is developing is truly wonderful, showing an ever-expanding knowledge by men of the natural laws and an ability to use them.

In what way can it be said that this proves that science has done away with religion or with God? Well, that suggestion means in the main that we have already learned so much as to make it certain that in the future we will be able to control all nature, to produce all the phenomena that we have been crediting to God; and that this will put man into the position which our forefathers used to ascribe to God. That certainly would be true if God is only what Dr Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, and others with him declare God to be. They maintain that he is not a person at all, who loves us and whom we can love and address, but only the assemblage of the natural laws and forces.

But God is nothing of the kind. He is the Maker of all those laws. To understand the laws of nature is very different to the originating of them. The fact that he progressively admits men into the understanding and utilisation of them does not justify the claim that man is taking over from God

or abolishing him. In fact it seems to me that the great advances in science, so far from solving that main issue, have presented us with a greater mystery than before.

As an example of this deepening mystery I would point to the atomic discoveries which cast such light on the structure and behaviour of substance. The atom which was thought to be the smallest particle in nature, actually described by the proverb as indivisible, is now demonstrated to be a whole universe in itself. The microscope cannot see it, but it possesses a sun (proton) and a planetary and satellite system (electron, neutron, etc.) of its own, with laws as detailed and as complex and as orderly as those in operation in our own solar system.

This scientific revelation opens up vistas of thought which make the mysteries of creation and human existence more inaccessible than they were before. Then how has science done away with God? In what way can we foresee that further scientific advances will do away with him in the future? It is certain that they will only remove him the more from our comprehension. They should not diminish our adoration and our love for him.

Normally it will be found that persons who insist most emphatically on the incompatibility of science and religion are not the true scientists. They are those whom Mgr R. H. Benson described as 'having attended science lectures but not too many of them'. They should be challenged to supply proof for their glib statements.

To sum up on that particular issue, I think that the net position is that science - now or in the future - is not going to affect the position one way or the other. To the unbeliever each new discovery means apparently that God can progressively be done without and therefore that he does not exist! Surely in the circumstances a strange assumption!

On the other hand the believer sees in each new marvel a further light on God, a richer penetration into his magnificence.

So in this matter of faith, science is apparently a neutral in as much as each side can refer to it as a supporter. If science can cause a thinking person to accept God as the only possible explanation of the bewilderingly wonderful and complicated but orderly system of nature, we must not allow the mention of it to dazzle fools into a materialistic philosophy.

The objection may be made: If science is neutral, why do so many scientists stand on the side of unbelief? Speaking very broadly, it is because Catholics are negligent in presenting belief to them; while on the other hand the anti-religious elements are assertive. The neuter yields to the force.

Here I return to an old proposition of mine which many would think too simple to have recourse to, not sufficiently up-to-date, not scientific enough. I would even place it before you as an absolute principle for your work. It is that you insist upon the miraculous. It is as apt an argument today as it was when Our Lord used it so dramatically. Propose that case of Elizabeth Delot which is described in our leaflet, 'A Formula of Conversion'. No state of science past, present or to come could explain that case. It is evident, unchallengeable intervention by God in a realm claimed by science. I guarantee that it will reduce to silence the most confident clamour to the effect that science explains all and therefore does away with religion. So use that case. One legionary presented it to fifty erudite Protestants of differing shades of faith and scepticism. It left all of them in respectful thought.

A recent report tells that a foremost scientist lecturing in Moscow University was interrupted by a student with this query: 'What is the meaning of life?' Annoyed at first because he thought it to be rudeness, the professor looked at the face of the interrupter and then at the other faces before him. Each one of them was dark with perplexity. With great honesty he declared: 'I do not know,' and continued with his lecture. So science had not solved the mystery for that professor, nor for his class.

Your work is vital. It is of capital importance to the Church because it constitutes a demonstration of the fact that every man is waiting for someone to offer him Faith. 'How can I understand except someone shows me?' said the Ethiopian in his chariot to Philip the Apostle (Acts 8:26-39). You are only birds of passage in the places to which you are sent. To you might be applied the words of the petrol advertisement: 'That's the Peregrinatio, that was!' But short as your time is, it is sufficient to demonstrate that you believe. And it can be every bit as long as St Philip had to explain things to that Ethiopian - and to convert him. In that space of time you may be able to drive in the thin end of the wedge, even if it is only the very point of it. Others then must drive it home. Part of that driving home will proceed from the inspiration which you have given and which remains behind you.

There is another reason why such effort as yours must be made. Often the local Catholicism is sadly diluted in quality. It may be little or more than a pious routine devoid of attractive or inspirational power, such that the onlooker can say that there is no faith in that place. In that event it will be an object of contempt to those outside the Church and it will not hold its own members. It is said in regard to one country that of the few hundreds

who read themselves into the Church every year, one-half quickly leave in disillusion. Having found in the Church there none of the glorious campaign for souls which they had found pictured in the books, they went out again into their grim atheism.