

LOOK: A PATTERN IS SHOWING

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I have previously spoken to you on the paramount necessity of making contacts. I define a contact as a spiritual encounter between persons. I suggested that the Peregrinatio is a mechanism for manufacturing them on a great scale. Frederick Ozanam says that the contact of one soul is needed to elevate another soul. Therefore as a first principle of our activity we must seek to make contacts. It is true that wholesale good cannot be expected as the result of a first contact. But then without a first contact there cannot be a second one. So now I am going to dwell on the subject of contacts, and with special reference to that first contact. We must not regard them as purely accidental occurrences. We must develop a settled attitude or what we might call a philosophy towards them. Of course it is possible that many of our encounters with others may only have a worldly and not a spiritual significance - in other words that they are not contacts within the meaning of our present definition. But perhaps it would be a better policy for us not to be thus classifying our contacts. Because God definitely wishes that spiritual profit be drawn out of everything.

In the Book of Tobias, where an entrancing account is given of the entry of the Archangel Raphael into the affairs of that family, there is an apparently pointless reference to the barking of a dog. The Bible appends a footnote explaining that there does not seem to be much purpose in stressing that performance by the dog but the fact is that God has a meaning and purpose in absolutely everything. Even if we do not understand why the dog was barking or why it is so prominently mentioned, there is a purpose in it. It would be a good idea to apply this thought to as many as possible of the events of life, inclusive of the small ones. Remember that God has numbered the hairs on everybody's head, and that He knows the name of every leaf on every tree.

So we should develop in ourselves the spirit of inspecting every situation from the angle of making it yield spiritual profit, or in other words of turning it into a contact.

The importance of having this outlook is proved by the infinitely great number of Legion works and exploits which have sprung from initially simple, accidental-looking contacts. I am going to justify this suggestion by delving into our Legion Case Book and giving you some startling entries. You will pardon me if this production of examples occupies a little time. It is essential that I should convince you as to my point. Each of the cases which I will mention took its origin from quite trifling circumstances which carried no indication of their providential character, and which could easily have been left unexploited. The mind shudders to think of this latter possibility. Perhaps the culmination would have come by some other route? But perhaps, too, that can be doubted. Missed chances are not always made good by other means either in the human or in the divine dispensation. We are given our chances and openings and we are treated as adults in respect of them; that is we are supposed to make responsible and full use of them. As Shakespeare puts it: "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of our life is bound in shallows and in misery."

I add: There are two tides every day in the natural order. Why should there not also be two of them in the supernatural order? So we must be on the look out for them. When something a little out of the ordinary occurs, it should be our tactic to wonder if it may not be arranged by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of enabling us to give Jesus and Mary to a soul. This idea may suggest itself as far-fetched, but the whole contention of my present contribution is to prove that there is a divine design and not mere coincidence in those casual circumstances and meetings. Then our thought must be that if God is really offering us a starting point, He intends it to be followed up, and that He will pour out His grace liberally towards its development. There is of course one intangible factor in such transactions, that is the will of the other person which can shut itself up against the impulses of grace and thus provide a full stop. But this is a consideration which we should not for a moment permit to hamper our action. The fact that God is urging us on towards that person suggests the contrary to that shut-in condition.

Having indulged in these preliminaries, I take up our Case Book to provide you with some

rather overwhelming facts.

Case No. 1. When Fr. Creedon came to Francis Street, perhaps the very first thing which was mentioned to him was the existence of Slicker's Lodging House, 25 Chancery Lane, in which lived 30 young street girls. That mention sank into his brain. Soon afterwards a Women's retreat was given in the parish by Fr. Ignatius, the Passionist. Fr. Creedon brought Fr. Ignatius to No. 25, in which follow-up you will see the sequence of contact developing. They gathered the girls together and addressed them. Out of that simple circumstances flowed the work of Sancta Maria in Dublin and of all the other Sancta Marias in the world, and of all the legionary approaches to prostitution. All that development came, so to speak naturally, out of a first small action. Looking back, we can of course discern that from the very first moment Fr. Creedon was being invited by God to do something about that lodging house. Nowadays one can see with absolute distinctness the divine pattern of the whole sequence. I put this speculation to you: How early on could that pattern be discerned in the proceedings? I think that I myself would have seen it at the moment when the girls, thus assembled in the big living room of the house, began to cry after the priests had spoken to them. They protested their wish to be good. They said they would work if anyone would employ them. That united manifestation of sorrow is not ordinary or natural. It is the coming out into the open of the Pattern. You will note that I was not there. If I had been, and with my present degree of experience, I think I would have argued that a providential situation had been created; that grace was working dynamically on all those poor Magdalens; and that there had to be a fitting sequel. I would have gone on to argue that it was imperative that Fr. Creedon must follow up in a manner proportioned to the Pattern. But that is exactly what he did. He made such instant provision as he could. He secured from the girls a promise of keeping off the streets and he agreed to pay Mr. Slicker the amount of their daily keep. This was only a temporary expedient. He then presented the problem to the Legion. It did not initially see a solution but fulfilled the duty of symbolic action. The series of 39 steps accomplished itself rapidly. Within six days those girls had all been on an enclosed retreat and were housed in the present premises in Harcourt Street. A fully grown Hostel had come into being with dramatic unexpectedness and perfection.

There is a case which, I think, gives us insight into what I am calling God's Pattern in every situation is that it supernaturalises our outlook, even if we do not discover any Pattern or find the opportunity of doing anything.

Case No. 2. I was late leaving my office one evening, an unusual circumstance for me at that time. I saw a priest whom I knew and stopped to speak to him. This was peculiar inasmuch as I was in a great hurry. I found that he was actually looking for me. So when he produced a letter from Achill about a pervert, I listened intently; I thought I saw a Pattern in what had already happened. The case was a very difficult one. The priest had just before coming to me been repulsed from the hostile hospital where she was lodged. He wanted me to try. The total set-up seemed to amount to a genuine impossibility. The priest assured me that there was no special urgency, so I promised to make my forlorn attempt at the coming weekend. But that very evening I found myself passing the hospital in question. The hour was 7.55. Overwhelmed by this further coincidence, which seemed to show Pattern as glaring as a neon-sign, I determined to face up to the impossibility at that impossible hour. I talked my way in; had my interview with the lady; elicited from her the statement that she wished to see a priest. I arranged for his going next morning. Even in spite of the fact that he had been sent for, he was first refused and had to threaten the anger of the crowd outside before he would be permitted to see her. He reconciled her to the Church and that same afternoon she died. Note that even if a single day's postponement had taken place, it would then have been too late.

Case No. 3. A prominent non-Catholic business man fell seriously sick. In some way or another it then leaked out that he had been a Catholic in his youth. This had not previously been suspected. Looking for the Pattern in this case, it was reasoned that the coming out just then of that piece of information about him must represent a sort of revelation of the Holy Spirit; which in turn meant that something must be done about it. A symbolic step was resorted to, that is the taking up of a subscription in his firm, the having of Masses said for him, and the sending of a messenger to him to acquaint him with this. He was a formidable and unapproachable individual, and the messenger went to him in trepidation. But the statement about the Masses which his employees had got offered for him moved

him to the depths. He poured out his life story in sorrow. A priest was brought upon the scene and all was settled up. Within three weeks he had departed. So that disclosure had indeed been the work of the Holy Spirit.

Case No. 4. In 1930 two ladies came here from Paris; heard of the Legion and became interested. They presented themselves at its ninth anniversary moment, that is at 8 p.m. on the 7th September. They declared that they would wish to start the Legion in France. Struck by this coincidence of time, it was suggested that if they made the slightest opening, I would go to Paris to follow it up. Later came their summons. I went into a situation bristling with holy coincidences and providential indications. As one of these, our interview with the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris was at the actual centenary moment of the apparition of the Miraculous Medal. It resulted in a hearty approval of the Legion. That looked promising, but the Legion did not start there for ten years more. That result seemed to afford a falsification of what had appeared to be an extra-special case of divine Patterning. But that visit produced the start of the Legion in the United States of America. Dr. J. P. Donovan, coming to Paris shortly afterwards, took up the running at the point of our failure and subsequently produced the first praesidium in America. And in this we see the resumption of the broken Pattern. The date of that start was the Feast of the Miraculous Medal 1931, a fact not adverted to by the American Legionaries but demonstrating that it was the outcome of the Paris visit.

Let me here explain that the foregoing case illustrates a strange feature frequently enough met with. It is that you can be drawn along by what looks definitely like a divine Pattern simply to find that it ends negatively. You are left disconcerted, so sure were you that you were being led. But then you find that another development takes up from that one and, when followed up, completes the seemingly broken chain. Note that this interruption may not be one of time but of direction - that is leading on to a target different to the one originally aimed at. On the other hand, it may represent both a new Pattern and a considerable halt in time. No doubt all this would be an exemplification of that process where God writes straight with crooked lines!

Case No. 5. My contact with Joe Gabbett was a highly significant one in my life, so many important things did it lead me into. Yet it was an accidental one in the street, probably just like any one of the thousand encounters which present themselves in ordinary life. It was followed up, and out of it proceeded big things for the Legion: All our picketing operations, which in turn closed down all the existing proselytising establishments; which then pointed the way to the Morning Star and Regina Coeli Hostels. It formed part of the divine Pattern that the little statue of Our Lady which presided over all Gabbett's enterprises, should preside subsequently over the first meeting of the Legion of Mary. It is the statue preserved in the showcase at HQ.

Case No. 6. I have mentioned the Morning Star Hostel. Our picketing experiences pointed towards the grim need for such a place. But that could have remained an airy business. I was visiting a men's lodging house in Swift's Alley owned by one Eddie Quinn. He casually remarked that he was seeking to sell the premises as he was thinking of entering the Franciscans as a Brother. That remark of his was seized upon and followed up. The Vincent de Paul Society agreed to purchase the premises for the work in question. That particular proposition petered out, but it was a case of that fruitful failure which I have mentioned above as leading on to something equally good or better. Because the negotiation for those premises concreted the idea and direction to minds. The next step was a purely accidental meeting in the street with the late Dr. William Dwyer who had just been appointed Commissioner for Dublin City. When he was told of our ideas, his interest flared up and he offered the present premises of the Morning Star. The starting of the Morning Star led on automatically to the opening of the Regina Coeli three years later. So you will see the rather mighty things which developed from circumstances to which we are found applying the terms casual, accidental, coincidental. A few coincidences should suggest a design. A series of them make it certain.

I have been proposing the idea of the Legion as a Presence of Mary. The legionaries provide a sort of foothold for her. Placing themselves at her disposal by an act of the will, they give her the opportunity to assert her maternal function. Note that the first consideration is not the degree of our virtue but the offering of our services in the spirit of faith. Then the Legionary theory is that Mary, possessing her means of action, automatically enters on her maternal office. Furthermore, the works

thus undertaken will not merely bestow benefit in the situation immediately at stake, but will tend towards development. If properly handled, the work should begin to grow in our hands. It would be like the case of the thin end of the wedge, or of a man using his shoulders to widen a narrow entry which he has made. Thus, if we discern and follow up a divine Pattern, we can expect small beginnings to proceed to colossal conclusions.

When I use the word colossal, I have in mind the growing of small initial contacts into big Legionary undertakings and movements. Of course not all contacts will develop into movements, but each of them should be made into a spiritual victory. To achieve this, your attention and your faith must be always active. Here may I commend to you the attitude of the angler, rod in hand, pursuing those aristocrats of the water, the salmon and the trout. You know how alert he is as he makes repeated casts of his line. The slightest jerk tells him that a fish is nibbling and he reacts sharply. If it is on the hook, it has to be played skilfully. Off it goes as if never to return. The line is almost fully paid out. Then the fish returns enabling the line to be wound in. This is repeated again and again, and at last the fish is laid upon the bank.

Things are somewhat similar in the higher order: Be poised for the contact which suggests that you have a fish on the hook. Handle it as earnestly as you can. When that contact and yourself separate, you usually do not know what has been achieved. But if subsequently you again meet that person, it is well to reason that he is a fish upon your line, which would mean that God has entrusted his fate to you. Even though you do not meet that person except at long intervals, you can still reason that you and he are joined by the line of your faith. Perhaps it may take a lifetime to land that fish. Indeed many of these spiritual cases are affairs of a lifetime.

How are you going to introduce Our Blessed Lady into this operation of angling? Perhaps the best reminder of her necessary and constant part is to regard her as the rod which you hold in your hands. It is the machinery through which you operate, without which you would be helpless. But likewise the rod requires your agency to operate it. It is your co-operation that enables Mary to fulfil her maternal office. Fr. Michael O'Carroll beautifully remarks that Redemption is a super-sacrament, and that Mary at the foot of the Cross received that sacrament in trust for her children.

Just a word about the Miraculous Medal. It is a great device for making contacts. To the person who accepts it, it is a vivid reminder of the fact that he has been in contact with you. Recently the American magazine *Time* had a special article on the upgrowth of superstition in the modern world. That article provided remarkable evidence in favour of something which the Church has always insisted upon, namely that if a person scorns true religion, he will soon be found taking up with superstition in every form. The people wrapped up in senseless practices and taboos of every description. It is important that we should cash in on that universal faulty tendency. We can do so through the sacramentals of the Church which are based upon faith and right reasons. God Himself intends that; hence the remarkable manifestations which He has caused to issue from the use of all those spiritual tokens. But of course there is much more than psychological process at work here. As God is trying to drive out superstition and supplant it by faith, He necessarily has to invest with great power the devices which He uses in pursuance of that end. Thus the chief power of the Miraculous Medal is not merely that of a device or a reminder; it is made the channel of grace.

Let me add that a Scottish legionary who recently visited Moscow rapidly disposed of the stock of Miraculous Medals which he had brought with him. They found extraordinary targets. Members of the Komsomol, or Junior Communist League, eagerly snapped at them, giving him in exchange their Lenin badges. Incidentally the giving of the medal can be the taking-off ground for an explanation of the Catholic Church and Our Lady's place in it.

When you make your contact, you must put into it all the faith that is in you. You must not limit your horizons by hoping for the doing of some little good. You must have nothing less in mind than a conversion or a conquest of some sort. Already I have spoken of initially simple contacts developing into great movements. It is not fantastic that this notion should be caused to enter into every one of your contacts. Because that sort of expansion is the very idea of God. He wants growth and you merely tune in to His circuit. In nature the seed swells into the twig and the twig into the tree and the tree into the forest. And that principle of course asserts itself still more fully in super-nature. In every soul God is

seeking that process of expansion. So you must aim at it always and He will cause it to be realised. In the spiritual order your part is intended to be one of activity and real helping - just as would be the role of the gardener in nature. If you contribute the faith and the effort, you can start and carry on that developing series; but likewise you can interrupt it. You can stop the seed at the seed stage, or the twig at the twig, or the tree at the tree. By our indifference and neglect we can even reverse things, and by the non-fulfilment of our part we can abolish even what had been gained. So to speak, we can put back the forest into the seed. Or in other words we can destroy a great work and send it back into primitiveness.

On the contrary, you must stoutly resolve to extract the forest out of the seed. The Lord says that an unshaking faith gives you that power, and you must take Him at His word.