

# THE HISTORY OF THE LEGION OF MARY

## Chapter I ORIGIN AND HISTORY

In a poor and old part of Dublin, in a property known as Myra House, in Francis Street, the Legion of Mary began. The St. Vincent de Paul Society owned the house and the local conference held its meetings there. Sometime about 1917 some women were asked to assist this conference in serving free breakfasts on Sundays to poor children. When, later on, the free breakfasts were discontinued, the women remained to form, with a number of the brothers, a recruiting-centre for the well-known Irish temperance society, the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association. For this purpose regular meetings were held, at which the prayers from the Vincent de Paul prayer-card were recited, with the addition of the five decades of the Rosary. There was spiritual reading, followed by the minutes of the previous meeting. Then reports were given by members on recruiting campaigns and any other apostolic activity in which they may have been engaged. There were also discussions on religious doctrinal subjects, as well as on practical methods of assisting others and doing good *for* the Church. The meeting usually began at 4.30 p.m. on Sundays and ended with recitation of the Angelus, announced by the six o'clock bell. These meetings continued until some time in August 1921.

Father Toher, one of the assistant priests of the parish, was present at all meetings. With his friend, Father Creedon, he was largely responsible for the developments which later took place. Amongst the lay-people the guiding spirit was Mr. Frank Duff, who has rightly been recognised as founder of the Legion of Mary. At this time he held a responsible position in the Ministry of Finance, a position which he later resigned to devote all his time to the work of the Legion. More than any other, Mr. Duff was to be instrumental in forming the spirit, forging the constitution, and shaping the destiny of the future movement.

### The "True Devotion"

One of the frequent topics of discussion at the meetings was Grignon de Montfort's "True Devotion to Mary." The idea was very unusual then—almost unknown in fact—and not clearly grasped, even by those of the group who were prominent in proposing the devotion. All, however, were so deeply interested in it that a special meeting was summoned for the purpose of discussing it and enabling all to grasp its idea. "I have often," said one of those concerned, "tried to place that particular event; it must have been almost immediately before the start of the Legion. It was just like making an electric connection and something happens. We spent the evening talking about the devotion .... **Then at once the Legion happened !**"

Hot foot on the top of that little meeting two of the ladies who had attended it approached Bro. Duff, and said: "Couldn't something be done to enable us to undertake the sort of work which the St. Vincent de Paul brothers are doing every Sunday morning in visiting the Union Hospital?" They were advised to seek support for the venture, and the following Wednesday was decided on as the date of the first meeting.

### The First Meeting

On that fateful Wednesday night, September 7, 1921, at 8 o'clock, fifteen ladies met Bro. Duff and Father Toher in the usual meeting-room in Myra House. What was their surprise to see that she whose name they were to bear was there before them! They came to the meeting ready to serve as soldiers under the banner and patronage of Mary, and, as in the case of all proper armies, the commander was there, ready to receive their enrolments. When they came to the room, the table around which they were to meet and which was usually bare was decked out just as for a present-day Praesidium meeting. There was the white cloth and the statue of the Immaculate Conception, two vases with flowers, two candlesticks with lighted candles. The Queen was waiting for her soldiers. It was the happy thought of one of the earlier-comers, though no instructions had been given. The meeting commenced with the invocation and prayer to the Holy Ghost, followed by five decades of the Rosary. When the opening prayers were finished there was spiritual reading. Then those present sat up, and, without realising it, applied themselves to one of the great historical events of the world, the mapping out of the Legion of Mary.

## **Organisation**

The first question raised concerned the auspices under which they were going to work. The unhesitating answer was that they had come together to serve Our Blessed Lady. They then decided on a weekly meeting and weekly active work. The setting of the meeting would be the same, and the prayers would be those they had already said. Finally, as to work, they decided to take on the systematic visitation of the Dublin Union Hospital. They would visit in pairs, a ward being allotted to each pair. This was the first work to be taken in hand, but not the only work. It was agreed that the work obligation could be satisfied by any substantial active work whatsoever, except the giving of material relief. The St. Vincent de Paul Society was doing that in the right spirit, and doing it well, so there was no need for them to enter in on that domain.

A president and secretary were appointed at that first meeting and they both set a pattern for all future officers. The president, Mrs. Kirwin, was Australian born. She was Australia's first contribution to the Legion of Mary and a presage of the considerable part Australia was later to play in Legion fortunes. Mrs. Kirwin ruled the Legion with a rod of iron. She was the only elderly person in the room, but she had the affection and confidence of all the young people around her. Amongst other valuable things, she brought the note of poverty into the meeting; she was, undoubtedly, the poorest person in the room. Thus, she caused the real Legion note to be struck from the start, the absence of all social and worldly distinctions in its membership.

Thus came into being the Legion of Mary as it is to-day in all its features, ushered into the world with the first Vespers of the Feast of Mary's Nativity. What a wonder! Who, contemplating those inconspicuous persons—so simply engaged—could in his wildest moments imagine what a destiny waited just a little along the road! Who among them could think that they were inaugurating a system which was to be a new world-force; possessing, if faithfully and forcefully administered, the power, in Mary, of imparting life and sweetness and hope to the nations! Yet so it was to be.

## **First Developments**

Let us now sketch briefly the development from the little organisation whose first meeting we have described.

By 1924 there were four branches and a central council was formed to govern them. In November, 1925, this council unanimously agreed that the organisation should adopt for itself the title of Legion of Mary. Other important and historic discussions followed. At the council meeting of May, 1927, for instance, the word council was replaced by the more distinctive and appropriate title of "Curia"; and in December, 1930, a fuller Latin nomenclature was adopted. By this time the organisation was growing conscious of its world mission, and it was this, as well as the need for consistency, which prompted the adoption of other Latin names.

## **The Christian Revolution**

Nineteen hundred and twenty-one to nineteen hundred and twenty-six—Five years, and the Legion now comprises thirteen branches. Much, however, has happened in the meantime. These Legionaries have acted like dynamite. More, perhaps, than the men of Easter Week they have revolutionised Dublin, and in the doing have profoundly shocked its easy-going conservative Catholicism.

In a den in Blank Street lived 31 street girls. It was taken for granted that they were a hopeless proposition, until one day an appeal was made to them. Twenty-three of them responded. In a body they went on retreat to Baldoyle Convent, and three days later they proceeded to a house providentially provided. That house, called "Sancta Maria," was the first of the Legion hostels. It opened on July 17, 1922, and had strange success. Sixteen years later it was found that of the initial 23 not one had returned to her old way of life.

The working of this hostel soon focussed attention on Bentley Place, a notorious area of tolerated vice. Bentley Place was an anomaly. In the holiest city in the world it was one of the world's worst localities. Its evil fame had gone afar and secured it a mention in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica." Bentley Place was attacked, systematically visited by the legionaries, and eventually completely cleared up. The achievement is an epic of modern rescue work. It has set a standard of heroism for all future legionaries and has demonstrated that no power of evil can withstand the visitation system of the Legion.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-one to nineteen hundred and twenty-six—Five years and the Legion's thirteen branches are still confined within the city walls of Dublin. It was only in the following year, 1927, that the young army began its march. In that year Waterford city gave it welcome.

### **World-Wide Advance**

From then on advance was more rapid. Glasgow was reached in April, 1928, and London in 1929. A start was made in Madras, India, in 1931. The same year sees a beginning at Ratton, a large mining camp in New Mexico, and the first American legionaries are men. Autumn, 1932, and the Legion crosses the Canadian border, when a group of Cowichan Indian men makes the first foundation at Duncan, B.C. The Legion's chivalry appeals to the heart of the Indian brave. In 1932, also, the Legion came to Australia. In 1933 the first foundation was made in the Transvaal, whilst a start was made also at the Cape. September of the same eventful year, and the Legion is established in the West Indian Islands.

Thus by 1932 the Legion had spread to the five continents. Since then there had been ceaseless extension, until to-day the Legion prayers are said in over 40 languages and dialects. There are upwards of a million active members, making the Legion the largest of all modern group movements within the Church; and statistics at headquarters reveal that the average growth is more than three branches per day.

### **AUSTRALIA**

Amongst the visitors to Dublin for the International Eucharistic Congress in 1932 was Father Henry Bakker, parish priest of Ascot Vale, Victoria. Father Bakker met Mr. Duff, who revealed to him the possibilities of the Legion for Australia. Father Bakker was quick to realise the value of the Legion, and attended several meetings before returning to Melbourne. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gavan Duffy, of Mt. Eliza, Victoria, also in Dublin at this time, had promised Mr. Duff to study the Legion in India on her way home. By February, 1933, she arrived in Melbourne, to find that Father Bakker had already approached Archbishop Mannix for permission to start, and had, in fact, begun the first branch in his own parish. Mrs. Gavan Duffy lost no time in starting at Frankston, and by the following June a Curia, or Council, was formed to govern the existing branches and carry on the work of extension. Of this body Father Bakker became spiritual director, While Mrs. Gavan Duffy was made president. How well this Curia did its work will be appreciated from the rapid extension which followed. The first diocese outside Melbourne to adopt the Legion was Sandhurst, with its inaugural meeting at Bendigo in January, 1934. Adelaide moved early in the same year; Tasmania and Broken Hill followed in 1935. A beginning was effected in Queensland in 1936. Perth adopted the Legion in 1940, and Sydney in 1942. In July, 1944, when the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Senatus was celebrated, the Legion had extended to every State in the Commonwealth and to New Zealand. There were 643 branches, with an active membership. of 5470 and an auxiliary membership of 35,000. Two items deserve special mention. First, the raising of the Melbourne Curia to the status of Senatus, or National Council, for Australia in June, 1934. Since then it has been responsible to the Concilium Legionis, or World Council, situated in Dublin, for government and extension throughout Australia.

The second item is the granting of the "Imprimatur" to the Official Handbook of the Legion. Though the Handbook was printed in Dublin for private circulation, it remained for Archbishop Mannix to give it an imprimatur. This action had such far-reaching consequences that by it the Archbishop of Melbourne may be said to have placed the entire Legion under a lasting debt of gratitude. For this signal service the Concilium conferred upon him the title of Laureate Member.

### **THE LEGION AT WORK**

Throughout the length and breadth of Australia the Legion of Mary is engaged in steady and unspectacular work for the salvation of souls. Its members, under the direction of the Hierarchy and clergy, strive for the sanctification of their own souls by prayer and by active co-operation in the Church's work of advancing the reign of Christ. The Legion places itself at the disposal of the Bishops and pastors of parishes for any and every form of apostolate which these authorities may deem to be suitable and useful for the welfare of the Church. And so we find the Legion of Mary

in a great many parishes assisting the priest in his pastoral visitation and care of his flock. The Legionaries are sent by many pastors upon a house to house visitation of all the people of a parish or district, not only to obtain a nominal census of Catholics but to serve as living links between priest and people—comforting the sick and preparing them for the reception of the Sacraments, giving encouragement and assistance to those who are cold and negligent, winning their confidence and by patient and painstaking effort bringing back even the most obdurate and obstinate to Christ and His Church. At the same time they try to raise the good and faithful to a more generous practice of their faith. Such parochial visitation is not, however, the one and only work of the Legion. It is but the first beginning of a whole range of apostolic labours which are as various as the local conditions and the types of members which are attracted to its ranks.

### **Work in Schools**

In a number of dioceses in Australia the Legion does a great deal of work in the instruction of children of careless families and their preparation for the Sacraments. These legionaries go regularly to the State or public schools and give religious instruction to Catholic children who may be attending them. At the same time, they visit the parents of such children and have had a great measure of success in arranging the transfer of many such children to Catholic schools where they are available. Again, in many instances, the legionaries have at the same time succeeded in bringing the parents back to the practice of their religion, and have been instrumental in having their marriages regularised.

Where junior groups of the Legion of Mary are functioning in Catholic schools it has been found by the religious teachers that the children who are privileged to be members of the Legion not only benefit themselves from the discipline and devotion of the Legion, but become most zealous and effective apostles of their companions and their families. Furthermore, such junior groups have proved to be the nurseries of many excellent religious vocations.

### **Hospital Work**

A great deal of excellent work is done by the Legion of Mary by the visitation of hospitals. The traditional kindness and gentleness and interest in each individual soul makes such visitation not only a consolation to the patients but a source from which they willingly draw fresh heart and confidence in God. Again, through its systematic visitation of the homes of patients, the Legion is often able to do much good to whole families. Worthy of special mention here is the work of several praesidia of nurses. Though the keeping of the Legion rule of attending 'the weekly meeting involves no little sacrifice of time and rest on their part, nurses who have persevered in their membership have found that it is a great source of grace and strength to them in their vocation, and a means by which they are constantly urged to be solicitous not only for the bodily welfare of their patients but also for their spiritual needs.

### **Apostolate to Non-Catholics**

In recent years the Legion of Mary in Australia has taken an ever more active and, widespread interest in the spiritual necessity of our non-Catholic fellow citizens. Already in some places Legionaries assist in the instruction of prospective converts. They take them under their individual care, supplementing the instructions given by the priest. They accompany their charges to Holy Mass and devotions, act as sponsors when they are received into the Church and are confirmed, and remain in friendly contact with them afterwards. In parishes where an organised campaign has been conducted to bring the claims of the Church to the notice of non-Catholics the legionaries have rendered invaluable assistance. Not only have they sought converts in their house to house visitation, and given particulars of the time and place of weekly instruction classes, but they have accompanied interested non-Catholics to them. They have also induced both Catholics and non-Catholics to undertake to pray regularly for the reunion of Christendom. At actual instruction classes the legionaries have also been present and encouraged non-Catholics to discuss their problems with the priest and to maintain regular attendance at the classes.

### **Other Special Works**

A number of chaplains to the forces have found a Legion praesidium to be a considerable help in establishing and maintaining personal contact with the men and women under their care, as well as a means for the greater perfection of its own members. In particular localities praesidia have been established to assist the clergy in dealing with special problems. Thus there are a number of praesidia caring for particular national groups—notably for the Chinese and Maltese in large cities. Such praesidia naturally attract members from such groups and give them a field of apostolate which they eagerly embrace. The formation of press-squad praesidia in many parishes has resulted in an extraordinary multiplication in the number of Catholic papers and periodicals distributed with much benefit to the people, as well as the kindling of the apostolic spirit in many youthful hearts. Other praesidia have the special responsibility for arranging enclosed retreats for men or women, Catholics and non-Catholics, while others assist in the direction of the work of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and assist, as required by ecclesiastical authority, in the recruiting and organising of official Catholic Action.

### **Legion Hostel Work**

Finally, the Legion of Mary in Australia, as in every other part of the world in which it has made any development, takes to itself the work of seeking and helping the most wretched and dejected of the population. Its members in several cities visit the inmates of the jails regularly, and, besides saying prayers regularly with them and instructing them, they do all they can to help and befriend them after they have finished their sentences. At the time of writing one Regina Coeli Hostel has been working for some five years and has supplied the poor and destitute women of a great city with a home and an atmosphere of genuine love most of them have not known since childhood. In other cities the legionaries look forward to the day when they will have their hostels. Arrangements are being made for the opening of hostels, too, for homeless and wayward girls who may have fallen or may be in danger of falling into evil ways, and who are not prepared, as yet, to return to their homes or to seek shelter in any other institution. There is little earthly consolation in such works. By the patient charity of the legionaries who staff the hostels voluntarily or who assist in the hostel in their spare time, and go out again and again after these wayward sheep of Christ, a change is gradually wrought in their cold and obdurate hearts, and by the grace of God many a soul otherwise abandoned is brought, in the end, to repentance.

## **Chapter II**

### **THE ORGANISATION OF THE LEGION OF MARY**

In great measure the remarkable success which has attended the Legion of Mary in so many parts of the world, under the widest variety of circumstances and in so many diverse works, has sprung, under the generous hands of Mary, from the excellence of its organisation. Its system not only enkindles the spirit of apostolic zeal in its members, but directs it to most effective service. While strong and firm in its framework, the organisation of the Legion is supple enough to give scope for every type of work. While insisting on the spirit of humility and obedience in all its members, it encourages the initiative of the individual in its system of reports and discussion. Through the control exercised over the activities of all its members by the weekly Praesidium meeting and the supervision of individual Praesidia by the higher councils, it gives every opportunity for a campaign of planned action.

To apply to apostolic work a firm discipline and a thoroughly businesslike method is a cardinal principle of the system. To bring home this idea to members and to indicate that courage and sacrifice are required for apostolate, the idealism and nomenclature of the ancient Roman Legion are adopted as far as possible. There is particular appropriateness in a Latin terminology for a Catholic organisation with world-wide extension.

With these preliminary remarks, we set out a brief summary of the salient features of Legion organisation.

### **The Praesidium**

In the ancient Roman Army the term praesidium was applied to a part of the battle-line or to a detachment performing special duty, such as holding a post in the midst of a hostile people. Appropriately, the Legion of Mary gives the same title to each of its units or branches. For they are outposts or garrisons on active service, fighting the

good fight of the Faith for Christ, under the special patronage and direction of Mary, His Mother. The Praesidium is a group or committee. Its officers are the spiritual director, the president, secretary, treasurer, and vice-president. The officers, except the spiritual director, are appointed for a term of three years which appointment can be renewed for a further term of three years. The Praesidium holds a weekly meeting, which must not last longer than one and a half hours. When there are too many members to obtain a report of work from each, the Praesidium divides into two. A study of the Praesidium will reveal a masterpiece of organisation. The use of ritual should be noticed; the firm, unchanging framework of prayer within which takes place; the informal and family-like discussion of reports. The length of the prayer is also noticeable, for the purpose of the Praesidium is two-fold, spiritual formation and apostolate. The members come into the Praesidium to pray, to plan, and to act.

Members may be grouped in Men's, Women's, Boys', Girls', or Mixed Praesidia, as the needs suggest, and as approved by the appropriate authority. Candidates under 18 years of age are organised in Junior Praesidia.

### **The Praesidium Meeting**

In an atmosphere made supernatural by its wealth of prayer, by its devotional usages, and by its sweet spirit of fraternity, the Praesidium holds its weekly meeting. The legionaries gather around a table, on one end of which, for purposes of the meeting, is placed the Immaculate Conception statue of Our Lady on a white cloth, flanked with two candlesticks, with lighted candles, and two silver vases of flowers. A little to the right of the statue, and in front of it, is placed a small replica of the Legion standard. At the direction of the president, the meeting opens with the prayers appointed—the invocation and prayer to the Holy Ghost, Who is the source of that Grace, that Life, that Love, of which Mary is the channel. Then follow five decades of the Rosary and appropriate spiritual reading. The secretary reads the minutes of the previous meeting. The president then takes reports upon the work allotted to them from all the members present. Informally each member in turn makes a short statement of the manner in which he attended to this duty. These reports are followed with interest by the meeting. They are often the basis of discussion, and they enable the individual members to get direction or advice from the spiritual director or more experienced members. Midway through the meeting these discussions are interrupted, and all stand to recite the Magnificat, with antiphon, versicle, response, and prayer from the Mass for the Feast of Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces. This group of prayers is called the Catena, for it links up all legionaries, active and auxiliary. All having resumed their seats, the spiritual director gives the Allocutio, a brief address reminiscent of the exhortation given by the Roman general before launching his soldiers into battle. This is usually based upon the Handbook of the Legion, and is directed to the spiritual formation of the legionaries. The organisation is financed by a secret-bag collection taken up at this time in all meetings. When the reports have been concluded and the work for the next week allotted to the members, there usually *remains* some time for a little study and general business. The meeting concludes with a united prayer that God may confer on them who serve beneath the standard of Mary that fulness of faith and trust to which it is given to conquer the world; and then, with the priest's blessing, Mary's soldiers fare forth to another week of conquest.

### **Government of the Legion**

To ensure unity, to preserve the original ideals of the Legion of Mary, to guard the integrity of the Legion spirit and its rules and practices, as set down in the Handbook of the Legion, also to extend its works and multiply its branches, the Legion of Mary throughout the world is governed by a series of diocesan, provincial, and national councils, with the Concilium, or world council, at the top. To each of these, a priest is appointed as spiritual director by the proper ecclesiastical authority. He has decisive authority in moral and religious questions raised at the council meeting, and a suspensive veto on all matters, with a view to obtaining the decision of the authority by which he was appointed.

The Concilium Legionis is the supreme governing body for the Legion throughout the world. It meets in Dublin. Its chief function is to maintain and interpret the rule and spirit of the Legion. It is the central office for Legion information, being in intimate touch with world activities through the monthly reports of the national councils. It seeks to establish the organisation in every country where a national council is not yet set up.

The Legion is a piece of apostolic machinery placed at the disposal of the Bishop. To see that this machinery is

maintained in perfect working order is the chief function of the Concilium Legionis.

The Senatus is a national or regional council of the Legion of Mary, exercising authority delegated to it by the Concilium over a particular country or other extended area. It is composed of the officers of every Legionary body, Curia or Praesidium, which is directly linked to it. Its spiritual director is appointed by the Bishops of the dioceses in which it exercises its jurisdiction.

The Curia is a Legion council, governing a group of Praesidia in any city, town, or diocese. It is composed of the office-bearers of the Praesidia in its area, and its spiritual director is appointed by the Ordinary of the diocese in which it functions. Its task is to ensure the exact observance of the rules and practices of the Legion by the Praesidia attached to it. It appoints the officers and sees that they fulfil their duties. It maintains the high spirit of the Legion in its district, receives reports from individual Praesidia, and does what it can to extend the Legion and its works in its own territory. When, in addition to its ordinary duties, a Curia is given the additional responsibility of caring for other Curia, such a higher Curia is called a Comitium.

### **Legion Membership**

Membership of the Legion of Mary is open to all Catholics who lead edifying lives and who are prepared to fulfill each and every duty which Legion membership involves. Persons wishing to join the Legion must apply for membership to a Praesidium. No candidate can be accepted without the sanction of the spiritual director, acting with the authority delegated to him by the parish priest or Ordinary.

Active Membership requires the following:

1. The punctual and regular attendance at the weekly meeting of the Praesidium, and the furnishing there of an adequate report on the work done.
2. The daily recitation of the Catena.
3. The performance of a substantial active Legionary work, in the spirit of faith and in union with Mary.
4. The observance of an absolute secrecy in regard to any matter discussed at the meeting or learnt in connection with Legionary work.

### **Praetorian Membership**

Active members who undertake, in addition, the daily recitation of the full Legion prayers, daily Mass and Holy Communion, and the recitation daily of some form of Office approved by the Church, are Praetorian members. The Praetorian Guard was the flower of the Roman Army.

### **Auxiliary Membership**

Just as an army, no matter how well organised, must have its commissariat, so Mary's army, the Legion, depends upon the support of a strong body of auxiliary members, assisting each Praesidium and forming part of its organisation. An auxiliary member of the Legion is one who, being unable or unwilling to assume the obligations of active membership, nevertheless undertakes to supply the active units, as it were, 'with ammunition by saying the five decades of the Rosary and other specified prayers every day for the intentions of Mary. By its ever-growing auxiliary, the Legion essays to make its own the confident words of Pius X: "I could conquer the world if I had an army to say the Rosary." By this, also, a barrier is raised against adverse local criticisms and a ready means is found to fulfil the special mission of extending and intensifying devotion to Mary.

Priests and those in Major Orders, and Religious who undertake auxiliary service for the Legion are called Adjutorian members. They form the right wing of the Legion's praying army. Their obligations are comparatively light, and may be included even in the busiest day. All that is asked of them is wisely to place their many spiritual treasures in the safe hands of her whom God has already made His own treasurer. They are asked to recite the Catena daily and make an offering to Mary to this effect:

"Mary Immaculate, Mediatrix of All Graces, I place at your disposal such portion of my daily Masses, Communions, prayers, works, and sufferings as is permitted to me." They may, of course, undertake the full obligations set down for Jay-auxiliaries if they wish. In either case, their cooperation with the Legion will be both the

source of many blessings for the souls it is striving to save, and also a touching tribute to their Heavenly Mother, who will not fail to take a special interest in, and give special assistance to them in their own apostolic labours.

### **The Legion and the Hierarchy**

Not only does the Legion of Mary depend upon the approval of the Ordinary and parish priest for its establishment as any diocese or parish, but it will never engage in any activity whatsoever without the approval of the proper ecclesiastical authority. What is more, the Legion, cooperating with the Hierarchy in its apostolate, looks to the clergy not only to direct its works, but to form its members. To this end, it helps the priest, in that it offers him a carefully devised system of formation; a secure way in which to lead his selected group to that perfection of the Christian life which is required for any true success in apostolic endeavour. It places at the disposal of the priest a permanent lay-organisation which, notwithstanding the voluntary character of its membership, possesses the rigorous discipline and the spiritual intensity usually found only in religious orders and institutes.

“Give me a lever and a support for it,” said Archimedes, “and I will lift the world.” What a piece of powerful machinery is to the hand that operates it, such will a praesidium of the Legion be to the priest who avails himself of it.

Between those working actively and those giving auxiliary service, and those being worked for, the whole population can be organised and raised from the level of neglect or routine to that of enthusiastic membership of the Church. A whole population organised for God! This is the ideal of the Legion of Mary, an ideal which every year since its foundation has demonstrated to be a practical one.

## **Chapter III**

### **THE LEGION APOSTOLATE**

The result of the working of the Legion system is to build up around the pastoral clergy a permanent, apostolic, lay organisation.

The stamp of thoroughness, attention to detail, and army-like discipline is a characteristic of the Legion, as it was of the Roman Army, from which it borrows its names. This perfection of organisation results in strength and permanence. Every detail of the system is formative, seeking discipline and efficiency as a means to virtue, and unifying all in its own devotional outlook and spirit. Thus the Legion becomes less an organisation than a living movement, offering to its members a way of life, an intense idealism expressing itself in disciplined action.

We may put this in another way by saying that the Legion of Mary is the religious order idea applied to the lay-apostolate. What is aimed at is not something equivalent to a new religious order or which would eventually drift into becoming one. The aim is to draw into efficient organisation great numbers living their ordinary life in the world and to provide them with a rule at once within their capacity to observe yet sufficiently exacting to be a means of perfection.

### **The Legion and the Priest**

The Legion of Mary is built up around the pastoral clergy. Hence, though an international movement with national councils, it is essentially parochial and diocesan in character. The whole idea of the Legion is to be the handmaid of the clergy. The Bishop, with his clergy in union with him, uses the Legion in his apostolate. The Legion's work is, therefore, essentially pastoral. Within the limits of the powers and state of the laity, they “lend a helping hand to the Church and in a measure complete its pastoral ministry.” (Pius XI, “A.A.S.,” vol. xx, p. 296.)

It is for this reason that the priest is not merely the spiritual director of a Legion body. He is the Director. How, indeed, could he be less, seeing that he uses the Legion in his own priestly work. This, however, does not mean that the Legion is passive. It is an active instrument in his hand. The priest does not act as president. He does not write the minutes of the meetings. He does not manage the finance. He leaves these things to the officers, just as he leaves to the other members the working out of the details of the plans which the Praesidium has made.

From the legal standpoint, then, we may say that the priest is the director, the supreme authority, the leader of the Legion. The idea is to link up priest and people in closest unity. All are one army; the priests are the officers, the lay-people non-commissioned officers and private soldiers.

## **Spiritual Formation**

But the priest is more to the Legion than its commanding officer. His position resembles that of the novice master in a religious order. The Legion is the mould in which he forms apostles. He must choose carefully and train diligently. His work is to form his chosen band in Christian perfection. Like his Master, the priest's pastoral method is twofold. There is the ordinary preaching and visitation of the people and the administration of the Sacraments. But, besides this work, there is another no less necessary, but all-too-much neglected—that of fostering and developing the divine life in those who seek to go higher. Christ's work would have been a failure had He not trained carefully the twelve. The priest's work also will collapse unless he forms around him an apostolic band. For, in the words of Pope Pius X, "What is most necessary at the present time is to have in each parish a group of laymen at the same time virtuous, enlightened, determined, and really apostolic." (Chautard, "The Soul of the Apostolate, Pt. III., if.)

To do this a system of some sort is required. Many priests are capable of inventing a system of their own. But if every priest has his own system there will be constant changing, which can result in no genuine formation, but only in confusion and disaster. The Legion offers the priest a standard system, so clearly set out in its Handbook that any priest can use it with effect. The Legion Handbook was written several years after the Legion was founded. It is the fruit of a wide experience in Catholic organisation. It is a solid, practical, and inspiring guide. It is excellent spiritual reading because of its wealth of devotional thought and firm dogmatic basis. It presents not the skeleton of an organisation, but captures the Legion spirit, portraying accurately a living movement. For the priest it is an invaluable means of training members. His theological training and practical knowledge of souls will enable him to grasp the spirit of the Legion from its pages and all his initiative, originality, and skill will find an outlet in its exposition to members.

## **Invariable System**

Having seen how the laity are assumed, as it were, into the apostolate of the Hierarchy and equipped spiritually for their work, we now come to examine the apostolate which results. The foregoing pages outline how the Legion supplies to the Bishop, ready-made and guaranteed to work, a system of apostolate which provides for the following factors: (a) Control and direction by the clergy; (b) the parochial group, with frequency and form of meeting, place of prayer, and devotional outlook; (c) officering and higher organisation. These factors of Legion organisation are invariable and are set out definitely in the Handbook. On analysis it will be found that they cover the whole relationship between the priest and the legionary. Since this relationship is based on the nature of the Christian apostolate, it will be readily understood how it is always constant. In this respect, therefore, the Legion of Mary is suited to all countries and to all types and classes.

## **Variable Methods**

A distinction must here be made (1) between the relation of the clergy to the Legion, and (2) the relation of the Legion to those worked for. The first is systematised and invariable, the second is not so. This is as it should be, for the second is mainly a matter of approach and method. The Legion system of control and formation never varies, but its methods of apostolate must necessarily change from country to country, from parish to parish, even from Praesidium to Praesidium. We are, the Handbook tells us, to shape our instruments to the work, our weapons to the conflict. Hence, initiative and originality are encouraged in the diocesan and national councils, whilst a wide discretion is allowed even to the parochial group or Praesidium.

## **Methods Invented and Applied**

A study of the organisation of the Praesidium, as described in Chapter II, will show that it is essentially a committee or group whose purpose is prayer, planning, and action. The knowledge of local conditions, the experience gained in grappling with local difficulties, becomes the property of the Praesidium, through the weekly reports. Detailed plans result from careful discussion, and through trial and error a suitable method for the place and its particular problems is worked out. This method may become standardised for a particular diocese or country. For instance, the Press Squad method of distributing Catholic literature, worked out in Preston, Victoria, is found suitable

for all Australian cities, and the hostel work, first tried in Dublin, is found equally effective in Melbourne, Glasgow, and London. In a number of places, also, experiments on convert work are being made. When these methods are perfected they are handed on to other Legion councils and Praesidia. In the course of time the Legion will be found dealing adequately with every type of work which the Hierarchy desires it to do.

### **Guiding Principles**

It is well to insist, however, that all Legion methods are influenced by the general guiding principles of its apostolate. The Legion's purpose is to assist the priest in his work. This at once makes the parish the first and chief theatre of Legion operations. The inevitable house-to-house visitation under one pretext or another is, therefore, the most familiar as it is the most fruitful of all Legion works. In all that may develop from it in the task of spiritualising the parish, it may be said to involve the entire effort of the Legion of Mary. Yet the visitation of homes is itself only a means to that personal contact with individuals which must ripen into firm friendship. Here we have the heart and core of the Legion apostolate, the supreme principle inspiring every method and expedient. "The essence of Legion work is its desire to reach every individual, to take into the sphere of its apostolate not merely the neglectful, not alone the household of the Faith, not only the poor and degraded, but ALL." No one is too bad to be uplifted; no one too good. Great good must be done to a great number if possible; if not, then great good to a small number; never a little good to a great number. It is to be emphasised that the effecting of real and extensive good can be hoped for only as the result of intensive visitation directed towards the establishment of a footing of genuine friendship between the visitors, and the visited. The Legion is Mary loving and serving Christ in His members. For this reason, and because the secret of influence is love, the underlying purpose in all Legion methods is the establishment of friendship. "The world belongs to him who loves it most." (Cure of Ars.)

### **Extra-Parochial Environments**

It will be deduced from this that an apostolate carried out in one's own home, in one's place of work or recreation, is a by-product of the Legion system. This is obvious in the case of the legionary himself. Trained and exercised in the apostolate within his parish, he must necessarily be an apostle, too, in his home, in his work, and in his recreation; in his trade or profession; at all times and in every place. The apostolic fire enters only as master, to dominate every thought and action, so that in all circumstances and even without pursuing a conscious apostolate sin and evil will have to bow to a power greater than themselves. As the Legion develops the number of such apostles will grow. With over a hundred such in every parish moral and religious conditions will begin to change in every environment in which legionaries are found—this without any reference to the change wrought in the hundreds and thousands who are the direct object of legionary attention in the parishes.

### **Uniting All Classes**

The pastoral character of the Legion, as well as its intense unity as an organisation, requires that, like the priest in the parish, it recognises in its own ranks no social, political, class, or trade distinction. Its mission to the entire population makes it incumbent on it to recruit from rich and poor, from all trades and professions, for it insists, with the Pope, on the advisability of like working upon like. This sometimes requires the setting up of special Praesidia in factories, in military camps, in ships, in schools, universities, and other institutions.

### **Study**

Study and the pursuit of religious knowledge find due place in its system, insofar as they are useful to the furtherance of the work to be done. In all cases, however, study must form part of a scheme for communicating what is acquired to others. Study alone can never justify the setting up of a Presidium; neither is intellectual proficiency made a requirement of membership.

### **Social Reform**

Social reform is sought by a definitely religious apostolate, directed towards the individual, who is the cell of

society. The object is to fire the entire household of the Faith with an exalted spirit of charity, knowing that in this charity and in this alone is the remedy of all injustice.

Legion methods may include the use of press, platform, stage, radio, and even mass organisations and demonstrations. But all these are regarded as secondary and complementary to its essential work, which is intensely personal in character.

### **Two Works Excluded**

Only two activities are excluded from the Legion—the giving of material relief and the regular collecting of money. They are excluded by the nature of the Legion’s task—viz., to bring spiritual good to every individual in the population. The Legion has found this programme and that of relief-giving to be incompatible for it in practice. Moreover, this excellent Christian work is being effectively done the world over by the St. Vincent de Paul Society and similar organisations. In much the same category as relief-giving, and coming under the same ban, would lie the regular utilisation of the Legionary visitation system for the purpose of collecting money. The money might be secured, but not the atmosphere for the accomplishment of spiritual good.

## **Chapter IV**

### **DEVOTIONAL OUTLOOK AND SPIRIT**

We now come to the inner secret of the Legion of Mary, the key at once to its organisational form and the ultimate source of its success. The general trend of its remarkable history, as well as a study of its Handbook or system, will reveal the spirit of the Legion, its devotional outlook, its philosophy of life. This spirit, the soul of the movement, is the fount of all its energy and action.

In this chapter we examine the spirit of the Legion of Mary in general, laying bare its dogmatic or doctrinal basis, and from this we move on to study the same spirit as revealed in the individual legionary. This spirit will first affect the legionary in his own life, and secondly in his relations with others. Accordingly, the division of this study can be put thus:

General—Doctrinal basis of the Legion.

Particular—

1. The Legionary and the Spirit of the Legion
2. Spirit of the Legion in his own life.
3. The Legionary in his Apostolate.

#### **1. DOCTRINAL BASIS OF THE LEGION**

The doctrinal basis of the Legion is, briefly, Mary’s universal mediation as Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. This doctrine contains such a wealth of ideas that it must be developed; and, first, a word on the Mystical Body itself:

“This truth has been described as the central dogma of Christianity. For, in fact, all the supernatural life, all the graces conferred on man, are a fruit of the Redemption. The Redemption itself is based on the fact that Christ and the Church form together but a single Mystical Person, so that the satisfaction of Christ, the Head; the infinite merits of His Passion, belong to His members, who are all the faithful. This is the reason why Our Lord could suffer for man and expiate faults which He had not Himself committed. ‘Christ is the Saviour of His Body.’ The activity of the Mystical Body is the activity of Christ Himself. The faithful are incorporated into Him, and then live, suffer, and die in Him, and in His Resurrection rise again. Baptism only sanctifies, because it establishes between Christ and the soul that vital connection by which the sanctity of the Head flows into its members. The other Sacraments and, above all, the Divine Eucharist, exist for the purpose of intensifying the union between the Mystical Body and its Head. In addition, that union is deepened by the operations of faith and charity, by the bonds of government and mutual service in the Church, by labour and suffering, rightly submitted to, and generally by every act of Christian life.” (Handbook, p. 145.)

We said above that the Legion’s doctrinal basis is Mary’s universal mediation as Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. Now, having seen what the Mystical Body means, we must pass on to examine the doctrine of Mary’s mother-

hood of that Body. In Christ it is impossible to separate His Divine Sonship from His Headship of regenerated humanity. These two are in one, as His divinity and humanity are in one Person. He came only to save; He came that He might be first-born among many brothers; that He might give, by incorporating them into Himself, other sons to God. This is the reason why Mary is Mother of redeemed mankind. she was Mother of Christ, the Head of humanity, and, as His Mother, was necessarily also the Mother of those who by baptism are made one with Christ. She could not be Mother of the Head and not be Mother of the Body. St. Augustine says: “Mary is the living mould of God—that is to say, it is in her alone that the God-Man was naturally formed without losing a feature, so to speak, of His God-head; and it is in her alone that man can be properly and in a life-like way formed into God, so far as human nature is capable of this by the grace of Jesus Christ.” Mary, then, is the indispensable Mother of the Christian soul. In her womb we are conceived in grace—that is, made one in baptism with Jesus Christ, her Blessed and Divine First-Born; and there we may grow during life, one body and one spirit with Him, our only Cause of Grace, till, through the birth of death, Mary brings us forth to life eternal. The Holy Ghost, pervading Mary, works with her that growth and sanctification. She once more conceives by the power of the Holy Ghost, Who is the life and soul of the Mystical Body; and over all is the Author of all Grace Himself, the Eternal Father. In this synthesis of the divine plan of Redemption we see at a glance the all-important role that Mary plays. This is the only true and solidly-doctrinal synthesis of Christian truths; any other is partial and incomplete.

### **“The True Devotion”**

It is for this reason that the “True Devotion to Our Blessed Lady,” by St. Grignon de Montfort, has been the textbook and basis of all Legion doctrine and devotion. Such a departure was this remarkable book from the general idea of devotion to Mary that even to-day to many Catholics, even deeply-religious souls, the “True Devotion” is regarded as a pious, but misguided, enthusiasm. Mary’s privileges in the Divine Economy are so far beyond our comprehension that just appreciation of her is thought to be romantic excess. When de Montfort complains that it is because Mary is not sufficiently formed in the hearts of men that so few of them come to the fulness of the age of Christ, we think it is but a picturesque expression. We think that Mary is in some way a digression from God—a devotional one, of course, but still a digression. But such is not the mind of God nor of His Church. God Himself it was Who first began to tell of her and to sketch out for her a destiny unquestionably unique. From the first the idea of her was present to the Eternal Father, along with that of the Redeemer, of Whose destiny she formed part. The Heavenly Father placed her side by side with His Son in the plan of Redemption. He went even further; that plan was to be submitted to her and made conditional on her acceptance. Does not everything else pale beside this stupendous fact! That free decision of her faith opened up a way to God; in it she received the Son of God on behalf of all humanity. Step by step the drama of the Incarnation reaches its climax in the Act of Redemption, and it finds Mary at the foot of the Cross, offering up her Divine Son on behalf of the redeemed human race, and in her role on Calvary she merited the right to dispense all graces purchased by the sacrifice of her Son.

### **Mediatrice of All Graces**

Thus her motherhood did not finish at Bethlehem, nor at Cana, nor at Calvary. A second mystical incarnation took place on Calvary when, at the words of her Son to St. John, “Behold thy Mother,” and to her, “Woman, behold thy Son,” she assumed her motherhood of all redeemed man-kind and His Mystical Body. Hence, as we are members of Christ’s Body, of His Flesh and of His Bones (Eph. v., 30), so, with equal necessity, reality, and fulness, are we children of Mary, His Mother. It is in her bosom, moulded ever more and more admirably to His likeness by her unremitting care, that we grow into the perfect Man, Who is Christ, and come unto the measure of the age of His fulness (Eph. iv, 13); and without her this, our destiny, is not achieved. Such is the Divine arrangement. Though she is, in comparison with her Maker, veritably as nothing, nevertheless, the Eternal Father has thus intimately associated her to His Redemptive scheme in such a way that, as no grace proceeds other than by Jesus Christ, so none will be received other than through Mary.

She is as definitely part of the Divine dispensation as Our Blessed Lord Himself—subordinate to, and utterly dependent on Him of course, but nonetheless an integral and vital portion of the Divine way of grace; an all-important supplement to what we offer and the invariable channel of what

we receive. "All the predestinate, in order to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, are in this world hidden in the womb of the most Holy Virgin, where they are guarded, nourished, brought up, and made to grow by that good Mother until she has brought them forth to glory after death which is properly the day of their birth, as the Church calls the death of the Just." This thought forms the central principle of the "True Devotion," but the words are not de Montfort's. They were written by St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, sixteen hundred years ago, and did not even then represent new teaching in the Church. Indeed, as de Montfort says, the devotion is bound up with the very roots of Christianity. What is it but the putting into logical and detailed practice of the Church's teaching on the Mystical Body? If the idea of the Mystical Body and its implication are grasped, not only does the doctrine of de Montfort's "True Devotion" emerge with perfect clearness, but it will be seen that it represents the minimum of what is due to Mary. By reason of her universal Motherhood, Mary has been rightly styled Mediatrix of All Graces. As she is the Mother of the Author of Grace and the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, by union with her we place ourselves in the very flood-tide of grace. "Because of Mary's intimate union with the Passion of her Son, all the graces which we draw from the treasury of the Redemption are distributed by the hands of the Virgin of Sorrows." (Pope Benedict XV, "A.A.S.," x, p. 182.)

Such is the doctrinal and devotional basis of the Legion of Mary, the universal mediation of Mary as Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is an inspiring doctrine. It is a doctrine which, when properly grasped, becomes a never-ending source of energy to the legionary in his apostolate and a constant stimulus to his own personal sanctification. Every detail of Legion organisation is ordered towards the inculcation of this doctrine and the Legion seeks, through its apostolate, to make this outlook and devotion a common-place of Catholic life throughout the Church.

## **2. THE SPIRIT OF THE LEGION IN THE INDIVIDUAL**

"It has been stressed that the sanctification of the members is the first object of the Legion. It is, moreover, the primary means of action, for only in the measure that the legionary possesses grace can he be the channel of it to others. Hence, it is that the legionary begins his membership by a request to be filled, through Mary, with the Holy Spirit, and to be used as an instrument of His power, which is to renew the face of the earth." (Handbook.) The first duty, then, of a legionary is to advance in holiness by developing his union with Christ and Mary. From this union two things should result: First of all, he will come to regard the Christian life as a growth in this union. He will come to understand the continuity of the life of grace with the life of heaven. The life to come is not just a reward in exchange for good done, but the flowering of the life of grace. going to heaven is not so much a transportation as a transformation: we grow into heaven. As St. Thomas teaches, grace is a certain commencement in us of eternal life. Grace is glory in exile; glory is grace at home. Intimacy with God, through Jesus and Mary, becomes, therefore, for the legionary the goal of human life, both here and hereafter. Virtue has now a new meaning, sin an added horror, the Christian struggle a stronger incentive.

The second result of that union with Jesus and Mary is the development of the legionaries' own characters and external traits. Today, in a mechanised and levelled-down world, people have a monotonous sameness about them. A well-developed character we brand as original and novel, something out of the ordinary. Now, a legionary, in acquiring the spirit of the Legion, develops his character in the fullest sense, and those who have come in contact with the Legion have seen what an extraordinary variety of personalities go to make up a Legion Group. That union with Jesus and Mary has the paradoxical effect of making legionaries highly individual, and yet bound by closest ties of loyalty one to another, to the Legion and to the Church. That union is intensified through the Mass and the sacramental system. "To the Mass must the legionary have recourse if a plenteous sharing in the gifts of Redemption is desired for oneself and for others," for "the whole purpose of the Legion of Mary consists in the making of its members holy, so that they in turn may bring holiness to the other members of the Mystical Body. Now the Eucharist is the centre and source of grace; therefore, it must be the very keystone of the Legionary Scheme." (Handbook.) In turn, that union of the legionary with Christ and Mary intensifies his act of worship, for in his act of adoration "he must seek to identify himself with Mary and to meditate on the mysteries of the Redemption through that supremely faithful soul who lived them with the Saviour and in them played an indispensable part. The legionary, lost in the

depths of Mary's soul, shares her faith, her humility, her Immaculate Heart (and hence the potency of her prayer), and swiftly is transformed into Christ, which is the object of all life." (Handbook.)

From this realisation of union with Mary in the worship of her Son comes the urge to participate more fully in the public homage paid through the Liturgy to God by the Mystical Body. To foster that desire to "pray with the Church" there is in the Legion a degree of active membership called Praetorian. Praetorian membership requires:

1. The daily recitation of the entire Legion prayers;
2. Daily Mass and Holy Communion;
3. The daily recitation of some form of Office approved by the Church, such as the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, the Franciscan Office (if Tertiaries), or, preferably, a substantial portion (i.e., Matins and Lauds, or the Day Hours) of the Divine Office.

This Praetorian membership brings out once more the true spiritual basis of the Legion. It is not an extra duty grafted on; it is the full flowering of active membership, and is the goal to be aimed at by every member of the Legion. A glance at the obligations shows the parallel between its obligations and those of a priest. Daily Mass, the Office, and the Rosary are the columns of the priest's spiritual life—they become the same for the legionary. Praetorian membership is but another aspect of the profound realisation by the Legion of the lay-priesthood and the lay apostolate arising therefrom.

### **3. THE SPIRIT OF THE LEGION IN THE APOSTOLATE**

The apostolate is the necessary outcome of the spirit of the Legion in the individual. For the legionary the apostolate consists in bringing Mary to the world, that every soul may be bound up in Christ. This "apostolate is built upon the fact that the main channels of Grace are the Mass and the Sacramental system, of which the priest is the essential minister. All the strivings and expedients of that apostolate must have in view this great end: the bringing of the divinely-appointed nourishment to the multitude, sick, and hungering." (Handbook.) And who gives nourishment but the Mother? Only through Mary, the Mother of the Mystical Body, is that body fed; all sacramental graces come through her from the Holy Ghost operating in her. Hence the Legion aims to bring Mary to the world as the infallible means of winning the world to Jesus. But to bring Mary to the world does not mean to call her to our aid in our service of the other members of the Mystical Body. It is she who summons us to aid her. As Mother of the Mystical Body, she has the divinely-appointed task of nourishing and caring for the Mystical Body of her Son, and to fulfil this task she summons us to help her; and rightly so, for membership of Christ's Body imposes on us the obligation of the apostolate. "The apostolate is one of the duties inherent in the Christian life. If we ponder upon it we shall see that the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation impose—among other duties—this Apostolate of Catholic Action, which is a spiritual service of our neighbour. Through Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ; a soldier must labour and fight, not so much for himself as for others. . . . Baptism also, in a way less obvious, imposes the duty of the apostolate, since, through it, we become members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ." (Pius XI.)

The legionary is a soldier of Christ. To Christ, His King, he swears allegiance, but to do so he must swear allegiance to the head of the army, Mary. In waging her war on the devil, in crushing, the head of the serpent, to advance the reign of Christ she has raised up an Army, a Legion. That Legion has pledged loyalty and devotion to her, who is "Terrible as an army, set in battle array" (Antiphon at Lauds, Assumption of Our Lady; Canticles vi, 9.) As an army it develops through its system all those virtues of loyalty, courage, blind obedience; and Perseverance which are essential for victory. In addition, there has been found in the soldiers of all the great armies of history a devotion of a passionate sort to their leader, intensifying union with him and rendering easy the sacrifices which the execution of his plan called for; and so it is in Mary's army, for she instils into every soldier of it an idealism which burns within them. She has become the leader and ideal of a Christian chivalry such as the Middle Ages never knew. Under her standard they advance, invincible and irresistible, for they are efficient in organisation as no army has been before, and within their hearts burns the flame of divine love and in their minds the torch of the knowledge which is of God. He Who is mighty hath done great things to her, and will continue to do great things to her through her army, for He hath regarded her humility and fortified those who most passionately have called her blessed. Her army will advance until the reign of Mary, foretold by St. Grignon de Montfort, has arrived. That reign will come, for Mary, the

battle of life over, must present to her Divine Son, when He comes again in glory, His Mystical Body, each member matured and developed, each member able to exclaim: "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is the day the Legion prays and works for and under Mary's leadership it advances towards that day. In the Legion of Mary knight-errantry lives again. A new age of Christian chivalry has dawned.

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