

# **The Legion of Mary in the Church of Today**

by

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Years ago, before the Second Vatican Council, critics of the Legion of Mary used to accuse it of being too modern, too revolutionary in its system of training lay men and women to perform apostolic works with and for the parish priest. The Legion of Mary was ahead of its time, and these critics were suspicious of lay apostles intruding into the pastoral field of the care of souls, a field reserved in most part up to this time to the priests.

Now strangely enough, after the Second Vatican Council, the critics (many of them the same as those described above) tell us that the Legion of Mary is not modern enough; that it is now obsolete; and that it must be updated to agree with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

These modern critics base their criticism of the Legion on their knowledge that the Legion of Mary instills into its members a deep devotion to Mary and a strong urge to bring the unchurched into the Catholic Church, and on the false assumptions that the Second Vatican Council wished to deemphasize devotion to Mary, and that the ecumenical movement is to replace the convert apostolate.

## **LEGION OF MARY NOT OBSOLETE**

It is evident to those who know anything about the Second Vatican Council that the Legion of Mary is not obsolete by reason of the Council's decisions. In fact, many bishops who attended the Second Vatican Council considered the Legion of Mary to be the ideal form of lay participation in the mission of the Church in this modern world. They considered it so relevant to our age that some of them, *e.g.*, Bishop John McElaney of Jamaica, started the Legion of Mary in their dioceses *after* their return from the last session of the Second Vatican Council. This would have been a very silly thing to do if they had considered the Legion of Mary obsolete.

His Eminence, Cardinal Krol, who, as an undersecretary of the Second Vatican Council, knew well the mind of the Council Fathers, has found the Legion of Mary "to be truly apostolic and completely in accord with the decrees and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council."

His Eminence, Cardinal Suenens, stated at Rome, while the Council was in session, that the Legion of Mary actually anticipated the Second Vatican Council in many ways.

Indeed it has been revealed that the Legion Handbook was consulted at the commission level for the formulation of the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. In that Decree Legionaries can find ideas and sometimes the very words repeated from the Handbook.

On January 6, 1965, Pope Paul VI addressed to Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary, a letter of praise and encouragement to all the Legionaries of Mary. Singled out in this letter for special praise was "the spirit of the Legion of Mary, (which) while properly drawing fruitful nourishment from the strong interior life of its members, from their discipline, their dedication to the salvation of their neighbour, their unflinching loyalty to the Church, nevertheless is distinguished and characterized by an adamant confidence in the action of the Blessed Virgin." To Pope Paul VI the Legion of Mary was relevant to those Conciliar days.

Having received demands from some Spiritual Directors that the Legion be up-dated and brought into line with the documents of Vatican 11, Frank Duff, himself a lay observer at the Second Vatican Council, began a very careful study of the Council documents to discover how and if the Legion system should be changed. At the same time he sent to Pope Paul VI a copy of the new English Handbook together with a memorandum setting out in detail the radical changes which were being pressed for by certain Spiritual Directors and others both within and outside the Legion. He asked the Holy Father for guidance and recommendations in this matter.

Through his Secretary of State, Pope Paul VI replied to this request on June 2, 1966. In this reply it is stated: "With regard to the Constitution of the Legion of Mary, the Sovereign Pontiff would have me assure you that there is no intention to change these, at least for the foreseeable future. Trusting that this information will prove useful and of consolation to you and your colleagues..."

This does console and assure us Legionaries that the Legion of Mary, as it is, is precisely what Pope Paul VI wanted it to be; it is precisely what the Second Vatican Council wanted a lay apostolate organization to be.

### **DEMANDS FOR CHANGE IN LEGION ARE STILL MADE**

But demands for up-dating, for radical changes, for a new look in the Legion continue to be made, especially by priests, many of them Legion Spiritual Directors.

Some suggest changes only for the sake of change, which is the *in-thing* to do these days; others suggest changes out of a real love for the Legion---they believe that if their suggestions are followed, more people, especially the young, will be attracted into the Legion ranks.

In studying these suggested changes it becomes quite clear that some of the changes are minor, while others are so radical that they would affect the whole Legion structure and, if followed, would create a new organization which would not be the Legion of Mary; it would not be the Legion of Mary as envisioned by its founder and approved by popes and bishops in every part of the world.

## **CHANGES IN THE LEGION OF MARY DO TAKE PLACE**

Since the Legion of Mary is an active living organization it is understandable that minor changes do and are taking place. In recent times new apostolic works have been attempted and have been incorporated into the Legion system and Handbook, e.g., the Patrician meeting, the Peregrinatio Pro Christo, the Incolae Mariae, Exploratio Dominicalis, and the True Devotion to the Nation. The latest edition of the Handbook reflects most of these innovations, as it does the changes that took place in the invocations in Legion prayers, in the nature of auxiliary membership, and in the abandoning of the Laureate Degree of Legion membership.

But none of these innovations have changed the basic Legion system, nor have they changed the Legion's basic principles and spirituality as outlined in the Handbook.

So changes do and can take place in the Legion. Critics of the Legion of Mary can be assured that their suggestions of change, if presented seriously through proper channels, will be carefully studied at Legion Headquarters in Dublin. If the suggestions are considered worthwhile they will be sent out in a democratic way to all Legion councils throughout the world for their studied opinion.

### **SOME SUGGESTED CHANGES**

What are some of the changes suggested by critics for the updating of the Legion of Mary?

**American edition of the Handbook.** In the United States there is an oft-repeated demand that there be an American edition of the Legion Handbook. Some say this new version need not change the principles of the Legion system, but it would present the same ideas in current vernacular, and would thus be more intelligible, especially to junior Legionaries.

This request would seem reasonable, but it is always made by those who never come up with a manuscript for a new American edition of the Handbook. These critics make the suggestion in the form of a complaint, and expect the work to be done by those who are happy with the present English edition. Any manuscript produced by the critics will be given careful consideration by Legion officials.

More and more, however, the Legion Handbook is being accepted as a spiritual classic in no need of having to be "retranslated," much the same as the English works of Shakespeare are not changed for American readers.

It is often commented that the Handbook was composed by a lone Irish author back in the 1920's and that Legion members have been obligated to follow it ever since.

While it is true that the first Legion Handbook appeared in the late 1920's, it is not generally recognized that it has grown from a mere pamphlet to the full-sized, three hundred page volume now in print.

The fact must be acknowledged that the Legion Handbook is a compilation of methods, works and ideals recorded officially only after world-wide testing and acceptance.

The Legion of Mary is *lived* before it is put down on paper. This being the case, its Handbook will never be quite "up-to-date" for many works and methods being tried today are not yet included in the present edition.

### **OTHER SUGGESTED CHANGES**

What are some of the other suggestions for up-dating the Legion of Mary? They could be grouped under the following four headings:

1. In this age of freedom the Legion system is too rigid. Legion discipline is not in keeping with the spirit of personal freedom ushered in by the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, the Legion should not insist on the strict observance of its rules. Instead of a weekly meeting for some people, permission should be granted for them to attend a meeting every two, three or four weeks; every Legionary should not be obligated to a substantial weekly work of two hours, but they should be free to do what they feel like doing; instead of being obliged to work in pairs, Legionaries should be free to work alone when they wish to do so; Legionaries should be free to recite whatever prayers they wish at the meetings, instead of being held to recite the set prayers of the Legion. There should not be such Legion emphasis on cooperation with and complete obedience to the hierarchy.

2. The deep Marian devotion that the Legion inculcates in its members is not in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Instead of the Rosary that must be recited at every Legion meeting, there should be other prayers (preferably ecumenical), or at least the Rosary should be cut down to one decade. Legion prayers and sections of the Handbook which mention Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces should be omitted. DeMonfort's practice of true devotion to Mary should not be encouraged, and its description should be deleted from the Handbook.

3. Legionaries should become more ecumenical-minded and less interested in the convert apostolate. In these days of ecumenical movements resulting from the Second Vatican Council the Legion of Mary should change its militaristic tone, change even its name.

4. In the light of the Second Vatican Council the Legion of Mary should become more involved in the social apostolate and in civil rights movements.

### **ANSWERS TO THE FOUR GENERAL CRITICISMS OF THE LEGION**

1. In answer to the first group of suggested changes we may ask: Is the Legion's rigid discipline in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council? In deference to the modern spirit of personal freedom should the Legion insist on the strict observance of its rules?

The officers who guide the destiny of the Legion of Mary---all laymen---do not feel that

the Second Vatican Council introduced such a spirit of personal freedom that would mean the throwing off of all restraints. They do not feel that the Council wanted to eliminate discipline in apostolic organizations. They know that the Council Fathers wished the lay apostolic groups to organize and regulate their own organizations, which would not mean a permissive relaxation of the rules and regulations of their associations.

When they read from the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity words like the following: "Lay groups and associations dedicated to the apostolate ... should carefully and *assiduously* promote formation for the apostolate in keeping with their purpose and condition," (VI, 30) the lay officers understand the mind of the Fathers of the Vatican Council to be that the Legion of Mary should insist on a careful and *assiduous* observance of its system of apostolic formation of its members.

Actually, the secret of the Legion's success (and success it has achieved all over the world) is in its insistence of the strict observance of the weekly meeting and a substantial weekly apostolic work. A weekly meeting lifts the spirit of the Legionaries and assures the performance of the weekly work assignments. Organizations which have tried to do apostolic works with a monthly meeting have for the most part failed, because in the space of a month interest and spirit can and does wane and die. This will especially be true if the type and amount of work is left to the discretion of an individual. The Legion's insistence on working in pairs will also be an assurance that the work will be done, and done well, and that one Legionary will be able to give encouragement and assistance to the other in the performing of the work.

One reason for a suggested change in Legion prayers and recitation of the Rosary is a strange objection, on the part of priests, to Marian devotion, which objection will be discussed later.

The Legion is criticized by some misguided priests for its insistence on complete cooperation with and filial obedience to the hierarchy, as though this is not what the Second Vatican Council wanted. Those who criticize the Legion for not exercising more personal freedom in relation to the teaching authority of the Church have not read the Council documents carefully enough. Had they read the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity they would have learned that the Second Vatican Council wants all lay apostles to "function under the higher direction of the hierarchy." (IV, 20)

Pope Paul VI, in his letter to Frank Duff, singles out for special praise the Legion of Mary's *discipline and "unflinching loyalty to the Church."*

### **IS THE LEGION'S TEACHING ON MARY IN KEEPING WITH THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN 11?**

2. To say that the Legion of Mary instills in its members a Marian devotion not in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council is to betray an ignorance of the Legion's and the Council's teaching on Marian devotion. One who resents the Legion's Marian theology also betrays the fact that he was duped by the news headlines back in

1963 which said that the Second Vatican Council was going to downgrade Mary. Another reason given for opposition to the Legion's teaching on Mary is that the ecumenical movement fostered by the Council requires a softening down of Marian doctrine and devotion.

But is it true that the Legion's devotion to Mary (e.g., its recitation of the Rosary at all Legion meetings) is in contrast to the letter and spirit of the Second Vatican Council? Is it true that the Council downgraded Mary? Is it true that the Council does not want us to recite the Rosary? Is it true that Ecumenism must exclude Mary?

Let's get to the facts; let's examine the records; let's go to the Council documents. What does the Council say about Mary?

**Did the Council deemphasize Marian doctrine?** In the eighth chapter of the *Constitution on the Church* the Council Fathers give us a strong reaffirmation of traditional Marian doctrine, for they extol her immaculate conception, her sinlessness, her divine maternity, the virgin birth, her perpetual virginity, her cooperation with her Son in the work of redemption, her bodily assumption, and her coronation as Queen of Heaven.

It is true that the Council did not define any new dogmas concerning Mary, e.g., her mediation of all graces, but neither did it forbid any Marian teachings propounded by schools of Catholic thought, e.g., DeMontfort's true devotion. Indeed the Council Fathers did not intend to make any extraordinary dogmatic pronouncements at all, and they tell us that the Council "does not have in mind to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which have not been fully illuminated by the work of theologians. Those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded by schools of Catholic thought concerning her who occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and yet very close to us." (*Const. on the Church*, VIII, 54)

Although the Council Fathers did not define the teaching of Mary's mediation of all graces, they did explain that the Blessed Virgin is rightly invoked by the Church under the title of *Mediatrix*. (*Const. on the Church*, VIII, 62)

**Did the Council deemphasize Marian devotion?** Certainly the Council Fathers meant no deemphasis of Marian doctrine, but did they wish to deemphasize devotion to Mary? Did they want us to discontinue acts of piety such as the recitation of the Rosary? Let us listen to the words of the bishops themselves on the subject: "This most holy Synod deliberately teaches this Catholic doctrine (of cult of Mary), and at the same time it admonishes all the sons of the Church that the *cult*, especially the *liturgical cult*, of the *Blessed Virgin*, be generously fostered. It charges that practices and exercises of devotion toward her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries, and that those decrees issued in earlier times regarding the *veneration of images of Christ*, the *Blessed Virgin*, and the *saints*, be religiously observed." (VIII, 67) Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Christi Matri* of September 15, 1966, (the encyclical that enjoins the recitation of the Rosary in honor of the Mother of Christ) tells us that, although the Council Fathers did not mention specifically the

recitation of the Rosary, this is what they had in mind when they said that exercises of devotion toward Mary should be treasured and held in high esteem. Here are the words of Pope Paul VI: "*The Second Vatican Council recommended use of the Rosary to all sons of the Church*, not in express words but in unmistakable fashion in this phrase---'let them value highly the pious practices and exercises directed to the Blessed Virgin and approved over the centuries by the teaching authority of the Church.'"

From this official interpretation of a Council document it is clear that the Second Vatican Council wants us to recite the Rosary.

Thus, on the subject of Marian devotion it is evident that the Council Fathers urge all of us to continue our exercises of piety to Mary, specifically the recitation of the Rosary and, by inference, Sodality devotions, May processions and the like. *In no Council document do the bishops tell us to diminish our devotion to Mary.*

### **ECUMENISM AND MARY**

Should the Legion of Mary give less honor to Mary for ecumenical reasons? Does the Second Vatican Council recommend this?

When Pope Paul VI, on November 21, 1964, proclaimed Mary as Mother of the Church, the Council Fathers rose to their feet and applauded most enthusiastically. Many of the ecumenical-minded theologians were not pleased with this expression of the mind of the Council Fathers. They felt that this would harm the ecumenical movement. They felt that ecumenism demands that we tone down mention of Mary, especially any glorification of Mary, in order that our conversations with our separated brethren be less tense and more productive of lasting results.

But is it true that in ecumenical dialogue we should tone down mention of Mary, especially if by doing so, we should water down the Church's teaching on Mary?

Do the Council Fathers advise this? No. In treating of Our Lady in the *Constitution on the Church* they tell us that theologians and preachers should "guard against any word or deed which could lead separated brethren or anyone else into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church (on Mary)." (VIII, 4, 67)

In their *Decree on Ecumenism* the Council Fathers tell us that "the way and method in which the Catholic faith is expressed should never become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren. *It is, of course, essential that the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety.* Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded." (II, 11)

In this same Decree the bishops tell us that the faithful in "their ecumenical action must be fully and sincerely Catholic, that is to say, faithful to the truth which we have received from the apostles and Fathers of the Church, in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed." (III, 24)

How can we brothers in Christ speak of Christian unity, of a reunion of the Christian

family, without talking of a common bond we all should have----the love of a mother, a mother who is Mother of God and Mother of men? *Ecumenism without Mary is like a family without a mother.*

The Council Fathers tell us that we should pray to the Blessed Virgin for the success of ecumenism. Here is how they say it: "Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayers to the Mother of God and Mother of men. Let them implore that she who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, intercede with her Son in the fellowship of all the saints. May she do so until all the peoples of the human family, whether they are honored with the name of Christian or whether they still do not know their Savior, are happily gathered together in peace and harmony into *the one People of God*, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity." (*Const. on the Church*, VIII, 5,69)

Mary then must not be excluded from ecumenism. How can she be, if we are exhorted by the bishops of the Council to pray to her for the success of ecumenism?

It is satisfying to know that now in this current time a discussion of Mary's role in salvation history is becoming more and more a part of dialogue among Catholic and non-Catholic theologians. Theologians in ecumenical dialogue are more at ease now in talking of Mary.

### **ECUMENISM AND THE CONVERT APOSTOLATE**

3. We are often told that the Legion of Mary should become more ecumenical-minded and less interested in the convert apostolate. In these days of ecumenical movements resulting from the Second Vatican Council the Legion of Mary should change its militaristic tone, change even its name. This criticism is hard to understand by those who know that the Legion of Mary was ecumenically-inclined even before the Second Vatican Council, and before some of the modern ecumenists were even able to talk. As far back as 1939 the Legion of Mary obtained permission from the Holy See to hold theological dialogue with Protestant theologians, and this was at a time when very few of our modern theologians were thinking along ecumenical lines. Around the same time, in 1940, Rome granted permission to the Legion of Mary (an organization intended for Roman Catholics) to receive Orthodox members into its ranks for the purpose of imbuing them with a missionary spirit.

The fact that the Legion system teaches its members to become ecumenical-minded does not mean that the Legionaries must become less interested in the convert apostolate. The Second Vatican Council does not want the Legion of Mary to deemphasize its convert apostolate. Indeed the Council tells us that ecumenism and the convert apostolate are compatible, and our involvement in ecumenical actions must not lessen our missionary urge to bring every soul into the Church. We can be active in ecumenism and still work to bring the many unchurched souls into the Church. Here is how the Council Fathers expressed it: "It is evident that when individuals wish for full Catholic Communion (*i.e.*, admission into the Church), their preparation and reconciliation is an undertaking which of its nature is distinct from ecumenical action. *But*

*there is no opposition between the two, since both proceed from the marvelous ways of God." (Decree on Ecumenism, I, 4)*

In their ecumenical work the Legionaries of Mary have in mind the thought expressed by these other words of the Council Fathers: "it is only through Christ's Catholic Church which is 'the all-embracing means of salvation, that they (*i.e.*, our separated brethren) can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.'" (*Decree on Ecumenism, I, 3*)

The Legion of Mary was active in the works of evangelization and sanctification from its very beginning. Among its first apostolic works was the care of lapsed Catholics; very soon after the Legion spread outside Ireland, especially into the mission lands, it became well-known for its successful work of bringing the unchurched into the Catholic Church. Certainly in these days the Legion should be praised for this type of apostolate, not criticized.

We all remember how Pope Paul VI sounded the call to evangelization in his encyclical letter on that subject. Since then bishops all over the Catholic world have urged their Priests, nuns and laity to become more actively engaged in the work of evangelization.

Theologians have been writing about the different methods of evangelization that should be used. They have been conducting workshops on this subject but hardly ever have they asked the advice of the Legion of Mary which, since 1921 has been most successful in all parts of the world in this work of evangelization.

I think that those priests critical of the Legion of Mary, especially the Spiritual Directors who claim the Legion of Mary should be updated, should be asked whether they themselves should not be updated in the work of evangelization and should they not use the Legion as a model for that updating.

The very name of the Legion of Mary with its undertones of military action disturb some in this ecumenical age, but it shouldn't. For although the Legionaries of Mary are engaged in a warfare for souls against Satan and sin, they wage that war in a peaceful way; they hate and fight sin, but love and care for the sinner. The internal organization of the Legion is founded on the order, discipline and loyalty characteristic of the military forces; that is true, but the Legion is by no means militaristic, contentious or antagonistic in its contact with souls; on the contrary, the Legionaries are taught to show in their apostolic work the patience, love and understanding of Our Lord and Our Lady.

The criticism that Legionaries should be more involved in ecumenism, should hold more dialogue meetings with other Christians, etc., may be the result of local conditions where the Legionaries have not been trained in the Legion system or where the local Spiritual Director may not consider it feasible for his Legionaries to engage in ecumenical meetings and other activities of this nature. The Legion of Mary system cannot be blamed for that, for where the system is faithfully followed Legionaries are

active in the ecumenical movement, always in accordance with the Council's Decree on Ecumenism.

### **THE LEGION AND THE SOCIAL APOSTOLATE AND CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS**

4. One final criticism of the Legion of Mary is that in the light of the Second Vatican Council it should become involved in the social apostolate and in civil rights movements.

To say that the Legion of Mary is not involved in the social apostolate shows a deep ignorance of the Legion of Mary. Again this may be the result of local conditions where Spiritual Directors and officers may not be training Legionaries properly or may not be permitting them to do the many social works being done by Legionaries in so many parts of the world. In some areas, there is a special praesidium which cares for street girls; another praesidium works with the derelicts; another is made up of patients in a mental hospital; another cares for prisoners in a city jail. Some Legionaries visit the slums where they clean and paint houses, wash the shut-ins, cook for them, read to the blind, teach the illiterate, put out the garbage, mow the lawns, remove snow from the sidewalks, transport invalids to church, etc., etc. And all this is in keeping with the Handbook which states that "the Legion of Mary is at the disposal of the Bishop of the diocese and the Parish Priest for any and every form of *Social Service* and Catholic Action which these authorities may deem suitable to the Legionaries and useful for the welfare of the Church." Frank Duff, founder of the Legion, elaborated on this theme of social service in a pamphlet entitled: *True Devotion to the Nation*. All Legionaries should read it.

It is, of course, clear to all Legionaries of Mary that social service does not include giving material relief, nor is it their primary work, but *evangelization and sanctification* of souls (which they try to accomplish even in their social service) which the Council considers a vital part of the Lay Apostolate, must ever remain their primary apostolic work.

Although the Legion of Mary has not identified itself with any particular civil rights movement, it has always respected the civic rights of all citizens and has taught its members to observe those rights. Indeed the Legion of Mary throughout the world has done much to bring about racial harmony. The Legion from its very inception has been color-blind. At Legion gatherings in all parts of the world, blacks and whites always mingle freely on equal terms. It may surprise some to learn that in this world-wide organization of the Legion of Mary there are more colored members than white.

The Legionaries of Mary may not be carrying protest placards in civil rights marches, but in their march against evil, they are carrying the banner of tolerance, understanding and love of neighbor.

So much for the specific complaints of those who claim that the Legion of Mary should be brought up to date with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

### **DOES THE LEGION OF MARY CORRESPOND TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S**

## CONCEPT OF THE LAY APOSTOLATE?

Now in a more positive way let us examine the Council's documents and let us see just what the Council Fathers had in mind when they tell us what the Lay Apostolate should be. And then let us compare the Legion of Mary's Handbook with the Council's concept of the Lay Apostolate and see whether or not it agrees with that concept.

What do the Council Fathers think the ideal lay apostolic organization should be? Let us listen to them as they talk to us through the Council documents.

In the *Constitution on the Church* the bishops give us their definition of the lay apostolate. "The lay apostolate is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself." (IV, 33) In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity the Council Fathers tell us that "the Christian vocation by its very nature is also avocation to the apostolate." (I, 2)

The Legion Handbook (first drafted in the 1920's) stresses the right and duty of every Catholic, by reason of his baptism and confirmation, to share in the Church's mission of spreading the teachings and graces of Christ to every human being. Indeed the Handbook speaks of this apostolate as a vocation. It is interesting to recall that the Legionaries have for years tried to convince others that the lay apostolate is a vocation.

**Evangelization and sanctification.** The Council states that the laity "exercise the apostolate by their activity directed to the *evangelization* and *sanctification* of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel." (I, 2)

The Legion of Mary always considered *evangelization* (i.e., spreading the Gospel of Christ) and *sanctification* (spreading His graces to others) as the first and most important apostolic work of its members.

**Mystical Body and lay apostolate.** Forty years ago the Legion of Mary stressed the teaching of the Mystical Body of Christ, at a time when not many theologians were talking about it. In fact, the Legion based the Legionaries' right and duty to the apostolate upon their incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ. This same idea is expressed in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*: "The laity derived the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself." (I, 3)

The Legion of Mary always insisted that the laity has the duty to preach the Gospel of Christ to all creatures. The Decree says the laity will "witness to Christ throughout the world." (I, 3)

**Renewal of spiritual life through union with Christ.** The Legion of Mary always demanded that before a Legionary could try to bring the means of salvation to others, he himself must renew his own spiritual life. This renewal means a progress in holiness which requires an exercise of the virtues of faith, hope, charity, patience and humility.

The ultimate goal in this progress in holiness is a close union with Christ. Through this union, which is nourished by a frequent reception of the sacraments, the Legionary will see Christ in every person and will thereby work for the good of that person.

Now the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* tells us that "success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's union with Christ." (I, 4) "This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy." (I, 4) "In this way the laity must make *progress in holiness* ... Such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope and charity." "Only by the light of faith can one see ... Christ in everyone whether he be a relative or a stranger." (I, 4)

**Lay apostles to have their own special spiritual life.** The Decree states: "The laity who have followed their vocation and have become members of one of the associations or institutes approved by the Church try faithfully to adopt the *special characteristics of the spiritual life which are proper to them as well.*" (I, 4)

The Legion of Mary, approved by the Church, has adopted a special Marian spirituality for its members, which is carefully outlined in the Handbook.

**Mary and the lay apostolate.** The Council Fathers have this to say of Mary and the lay apostolate: "The perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles ... All should devoutly venerate her and commend their life and apostolate to her maternal care." (I, 4) Need we say that the Legionaries do take Mary as their model and queen, and they do commend their apostolate to her maternal care?

**Evangelization by word of mouth.** How does the Council want true lay apostles to convey Christ's message and grace to all? By the example of a good Christian life alone? No, but by word of mouth. They must talk of religion to others. "An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to *announce Christ by words* addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life." (II, 6) For many years Legionaries of Mary have been doing this, and in doing it, they have had to bear the brunt of much criticism and be looked upon as eccentric do-gooders. Now they are happy to learn that the Council Fathers want all true lay apostles to do the same thing.

**Lay apostles and the art of conversation.** The Council wants lay apostles to be trained in the art of "striking up friendly conversations with others." (VI, 29) "In regard to the apostolate for evangelizing and sanctifying men, the laity must be specially formed to engage in conversation with others." (VI, 31)

Everyone who knows the Legion of Mary knows how it trains its members in the art of conversation.

**Lay apostles must work against modern errors and vices.** In these days, the Council tells us, "The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation." (II, 7) They must work vigorously against the many errors men have

fallen into concerning the true God, the nature of man, and the principles of the moral law; they must fight against the corruption of morals; and they must try to help those "who having trusted excessively in the progress of the natural sciences and the technical arts, have fallen into an *idolatry of temporal things* and have become their slaves rather than their masters." (II, 7)

The Legion Handbook and its way of life teaches Legionaries how to combat these errors and vices, and this is what the Legionaries, as soldiers of Mary, have sometimes been criticized for doing.

**The lay apostolate must be world-wide in scope.** The Council states that lay apostles "should not limit their cooperation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national and international fields." (III, 10) We know that the Legion of Mary does not limit its activities to the parochial or diocesan boundaries. World-wide as it is, it instills into its members a consciousness of the catholicity of the Church. The *Peregrinatio Pro Christo*, an activity in the Legion, which sends its members to other countries seeking conversions, emphasizes the need of Legionaries to be interested in the care of souls wherever they are. The Council says that: "The global nature of the Church's mission requires that apostolic enterprises of Catholics should more and more develop *organized forms in the international sphere. Catholic international organizations will more effectively achieve their purpose if the groups comprising them, as well as their members, are more closely united to these international organizations.*" (IV, 19) The Legion, through its monthly council meetings, (to which some critics object) creates a bond of unity of its members all over the world.

**Legion envoys.** The Council states that "There is a source of great joy for the Church in the fact that there is a daily increase in the number of lay persons who offer their personal service to apostolic associations and activities, either within the limits of their own nation or in the international field or especially in Catholic mission communities and in regions where the Church has only recently been implanted." (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, IV, 22)

For many years the Legion of Mary has been sending envoys to missionary lands especially, to set up an active lay apostolate in these territories. These envoys, young men and women, take off three to five years, or more, from work at home to go to these distant lands and to live with the people while teaching them how they can become lay apostles in the Legion of Mary. The Legion is very proud of two such envoys: Edel Quinn, envoy to Africa, whose cause of beatification is now being studied at Rome and Alphonse Lamb, envoy to South America, whose cause has also been opened. In the 70's, the Legion introduced *Incolae Mariae*, whereby a member will take a job in a foreign place and spend all free time working for the Church.

**Lay apostolate and youth.** The Decree urges young persons to take an active part in the lay apostolate. (III, 12) The Legion of Mary has a full program for young persons either as Junior (grade school) or Intermediate (high school) Legionaries. Through Legion of Mary programs the young do take a very active part in the lay apostolate.

**Organized apostolate.** The Council praises the group apostolate and states that

"associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common *sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work* so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own." (VI, 18) No other lay organization fits this description better than the Legion of Mary which through its weekly praesidium and monthly council meetings sustains and forms its members, and which with great precision organizes and regulates their apostolic work.

**Needed characteristics of lay apostolic groups.** The Decree names three characteristics which lay apostolic groups must have if they are to be listed under the name of Catholic Action:

1. "The immediate aim of organizations of this kind is the Church's apostolic aim, that is, *evangelization* and *sanctification* of men and the formation of a Christian conscience among them so that they can infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life." (IV, 20)
2. The laity working in an organized body. (IV, 20)
3. "The laity functioning under the higher direction of the hierarchy." (IV, 20)

The Legion of Mary, a highly organized association, has the evangelization and sanctification of its own members and, through them, of other souls, as its primary objective. The Legion's loyalty and obedience to the hierarchy, as set down in the Handbook, has become one of its distinctive characteristics.

In return the "hierarchy entrusts to the laity certain functions which are more closely connected with pastoral duties, such as the *teaching of Christian doctrine*, certain *liturgical actions* and the *care of souls*. By virtue of this mission, the laity are fully subject to higher ecclesiastical control in the performance of this work." (V, 24)

The Handbook of the Legion of Mary states that: "To the Priest the Legion gives respect and obedience which are owing to lawful superiors, yet more than this. Its 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. It follows that a first principle of Legionary action must be the bringing of the Priest to the People, not always in person--for that may be impossible---but everywhere in influence and in understanding."

"This is the essential idea of the Legion apostolate. Lay it will be in bulk of membership, but working in inseparable union with its Priests, and under their captaincy, and with absolute identity of interests."

**Formation of lay apostles.** What do the Council Fathers say of the formation needed for lay apostles? Must the spiritual formation be the usual formation given to members of a parish? Or is something special needed for the lay apostles of Vatican II?

They tell us that "in addition to the formation which is common for all Christians, many

forms of the apostolate demand *also a specific and particular formation* because of the variety of persons and circumstances." (VI, 28) "Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of spiritual life." (VI, 29)

The Legion of Mary does have its specific spiritual, doctrinal and technical formation, because of which it is often criticized by priests and religious who do not understand that the Second Vatican Council wants lay apostolic groups to have the right to their own specifically lay formation in the apostolate. These critics would understand the Legion better if they would only understand the mind of the Vatican Council Fathers better. If the Legion of Mary wants specific spiritual formation according to a specific Marian theology (approved by Vatican II) then priests and religious must give them this formation, if these priests and religious want to follow the directives of Vatican II. (V, 25)

**Formation through planned activity.** "Since formation for the apostolate cannot consist in merely theoretical instruction, from the beginning of this formation the laity should gradually and prudently learn how to view, judge and do all things in the light of faith as well as to develop and improve themselves *along with others* through *doing*, thereby entering into *active service* to the Church. This formation requires ... *planned activity*." (VI, 29)

From the very beginning of its existence in 1921 the Legion of Mary insisted that its members be formed not only through prayers and other spiritual aids but also by *doing*, by *active service* and by *planned activity*. In the Legion of Mary, apostolic work is always planned and assigned to members in pairs who will thus improve themselves along with others by *doing* ... as the Council wants.

**Small groups and frequent meetings.** The Legion of Mary, with its weekly meeting of small groups at which Catholic doctrine is discussed by members, and explained by the Spiritual Director, and techniques of apostolic works are discussed, does give its members the apostolic formation recommended by the Council Fathers.

The Council, in effect, describes a Legion of Mary meeting when it states: "Their members meet in *small groups* with their associates or friends, *examine methods and results of their apostolic activity*, and compare their daily way of life with the Gospel." (VI, 30)

The Council enumerates the following "aids for lay persons devoted to the apostolate, namely: *study sessions, congresses, periods of recollection, spiritual exercises, frequent meetings, conferences, books and periodicals*." (VI, 32)

I believe that the Legion of Mary may be the only lay apostolic organization which actually makes use of *all* these aids recommended by the Council. Indeed, the Legion has a study session at its weekly meetings, its councils have congresses and conferences at determined intervals, each council has an annual Day of Recollection and an annual closed week-end Retreat. At its *frequent meetings*, *i.e.*, weekly, the Legion does have available books and periodicals for the formation of its members.

**Approved lay apostolic organizations to be esteemed by all.** The Council says that "all associations of the apostolate must be given due appreciation. Those, however, which the hierarchy have praised or recommended ... or have ordered to be established as particularly urgent, must be held in highest esteem by priests, religious and laity." (IV, 2 1)

The Legion of Mary is never set up in any diocese without the permission and approval of the Bishop of the diocese. Hence, when the Legion is established in an area, the Council tells us, it should be held in the highest esteem by priests, religious and laity.

This is true not only because the Legion of Mary has the approval of the Bishop of the diocese but because it has proved itself to be an organization through which the laity of the diocese can effectively participate in the Church's mission, and because it is a form of the lay apostolate which the Second Vatican Council Fathers want and approve--- because it is relevant to our age.

### **CONCLUSION**

Since the Legion of Mary corresponds exactly to the Second Vatican Council's concept of the lay apostolate, and since it is relevant to our age, it is very clear that it is not in need of updating. Rather, the Legion's critics should become up-to-date in learning just what this modern organization is. They should study the Legion of Mary with an unbiased mind and learn what others already know, namely, that the Legion of Mary is the lay organization best fitted for the implementation of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. They should learn what the late Cardinal Riberi meant when he said: "The Legion of Mary is a miracle of these modern times."