1955

036 - The Legion of Mary

Edward B. Kotter

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_reprints

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_reprints/8
The Legion of Mary

EDWARD B. KOTTER

Number 36
ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Father Edward B. Kotter is a priest of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and is spiritual director of Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, Norwood, Ohio. For many years he has been active in the Legion of Mary work, and presently he is spiritual director of the Cincinnati Regional Senatus of the Legion of Mary. His articles on the lay apostolate have appeared in Queen of all Hearts.

The present reprint, adapted from a talk given by Father Kotter at the second Marian Institute of the Marian Library (1954), outlines the basic principles of the apostolic devotion of the Legion, with many references to the Handbook.


(published with ecclesiastical approbation)
The Legion of Mary
Edward B. Kotter

Pius XII wrote in the encyclical "Fulgens Corona": "This centenary celebration should not only serve to revive Catholic Faith and devotion to the Mother of God in the souls of all, but Christians should also, in as far as possible, conform their lives to the image of the same Virgin". In these words the Holy Father defined the threefold objective of Marian Year: to strengthen our faith in the role of Mary in the salvation of souls, to encourage a devotion to the Mother of God that is in keeping with that faith, and to urge us to imitate her perfect conformity to the precepts and example of her Son. These three objectives of the Marian Year are the objectives of the Legion of Mary.

The role of Mary and the legionaries' relation to her are described in the Handbook which every legionary, according to his capacity, is required to know. "The Handbook contains in briefest possible compass what is important that every properly equipped legionary should know of the principles, the laws, the methods, and the spirit of the organization." (Handbook, p. 157) It is sometimes objected that the Handbook is full of abstract ideas and advanced matters that are difficult for the ordinary Catholic to understand. The Legion is a school of the apostolate and of Mary. It is the function of a school to lead a student on to further knowledge. These difficult ideas are not beyond the grasp of ordinary and even simple people, as experience proves. Neither can they be, for they are fundamental Catholic truths meant for everybody and not restricted to a few. Not only can they be understood by all but they must be. They are only the common principles that need to be understood in order to fulfill properly the apostolate.

The Legion is more concerned about a way of life than with a program of works. This way of life the Legion would teach not only through its Handbook but in the very exercise of the apostolate itself. It is significant that a book described in the Osservatore Romano as "one of the most important books of our time", should be written about "The Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary". In his foreword the author, Msgr. Leon Joseph Suenens, Auxiliary Bishop of Malines, refers to "Legion spirituality". He explains that the Legion does not lay claim to some special teaching of its own but emphasizes a normal Catholicism. The words of the Bishop will serve to reassure hesitant souls who are fearful that an
THE LEGION OF MARY

apostolate like that of the Legion is an intrusion on the work of priests and religious and who fear that Legion devotion to Mary may be a pious, and even dangerous, exaggeration.

"...the Legion implies living a normal Catholicism, normal, it should be emphasized, not average. Nowadays we are apt to think of the normal Catholic as one who practices his religion on his own account without worrying himself about the salvation of others. This is a caricature of the NORMAL Catholic. The notion of a 'good Catholic' or a 'practicing Catholic' requires close examination and should be subjected to considerable revision. One cannot be a Catholic if one falls short of a certain minimum of apostolic activity, and this in- dispensable minimum, which will be fully taken into account at the last judgment, is not achieved by the mass of 'practicing Catholics'. Therein lies the tragedy and the fundamental misunderstanding.

All that is said here about the duty of the lay apostolate...which is an essential feature of the Legion, could be said equally well of its devotion to our Lady. The Legion loves Mary as the Church does, no more, no less, that is to say, exceedingly. The Legion intends to practice normal devotion to our Lady, that is, Christian devotion. If this ambition leads far, if the gift of self follows in the wake of this inspiration, it is because Christ Himself desires to continue loving His Mother in us, and urges us to extend our filial love in the measure of His own. The Legion desires simply to love Mary with the Heart of Christ, as it endeavors to love Christ with the heart of Mary. Since this is God's will and design, it accepts it with faith and with no timidity or reserve.

Doctrinally it claims no greater originality than that. It is fidelity, and where necessary a return, to authentic tradition. This is its ideal and its aim. If then we use the term Legionary spirituality it is solely to mark those characteristics set in strong relief against the common heritage of the Church's children. If sometimes the Legion causes astonishment by its requirements it is due to no seeking after the unusual but is the consequence of is concern to live a full and vigorous Christianity." (Theology of the Apostle, p. xiv)

Understanding now that the Legion is a school of spirituality and that the spirituality it teaches is not a product of its own but is the certain and
THE LEGION OF MARY

traditional teaching of the Church, we want to know what the Legion teaches about the role that God has given Mary in our sanctification, what devotion to Mary the Legion sets before its members, and how it encourages them to imitate her virtues.

The Legion insists upon giving Mary the place in Christianity that God gives her. It knows that Mary’s role in the salvation of mankind, by the will of God, is an essential one and that consequently she cannot be kept in the background without distorting the true picture of God’s plan. At the same time in giving Mary her rightful place, and thus avoiding a misrepresentation of Christianity by default, the Legion has been careful to avoid the other danger of excess. It does not consider Mary by herself, but always in relation to her Son. Mary is a part of the divine plan and must be considered in the light of that plan. The Legion sets Mary before us as our Mediatrix with her Son, but never makes the mistake of implying that there is need of a mediating element between Him and us because Christ is too far away from us. It does not make the mistake, either, of representing the Saviour too exclusively as a just and terrible Judge, thereby suggesting the necessity of a mediatrix of mercy. In keeping Mary before the legionaries, the Legion always shows her collaborating, in a secondary and dependent way, with her Son.

TWO PRINCIPLES BASED ON THE MYSTICAL BODY

The Legion system is built upon two principles which in turn are consequences of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. Both principles are embodied in the well-known phrase: “To Jesus through Mary”. The first of these principles is the necessity of seeing in others the Person of Christ Himself. The second principle takes cognizance of the role of Mary and states that everything should be done in such a spirit of union with her that it is Mary working through the legionary who really performs it. These two principles enter not only into the service that the legionaries render to others but also into their relations with one another. Once a month they are reminded in a meeting that legionary duty requires from each legionary “the performance of a substantial active legionary work, in the spirit of faith, and in union with Mary, in such fashion that in those worked for and in one’s fellow members, the Person of Our Lord is once again seen and served by Mary, His Mother”.

FIRST PRINCIPLE: TO JESUS

By baptism men are attached to Christ by most intimate ties. They are
incorporated into Him and become one body with Him. As members of Christ’s Body they have obligations of love and service to Christ, their Head, and likewise to one another. What they do to anyone of His members they do to Christ Himself. Hence the Legion insists that in those worked for and in fellow legionaries the Person of Our Lord is once again seen and served. There can be no distinction of person. All mankind is either already incorporated into Christ or is called to be incorporated. Legionaries must see Christ in all without distinction, even in the sinner, the ungrateful, the despised, and in persons who are the object of the greatest natural repulsion. It is Christ in their neighbor whom they serve. Service then, even to the least brethren, since it is rendered to Christ, must be the service of an inferior to a superior, of a servant to his Lord. One does not see Christ in his neighbor if he approaches another as to an inferior or even as to an equal. A service even to the least brethren must be a princely and reverential service. One’s whole demeanor must show respect.

Christ must be seen likewise in one’s fellow legionaries. Legion membership must be independent of the fact that one has a president or a colleague whom one finds pleasant or unpleasant. It must be independent of real or imagined slights or lack of appreciation, or of disagreements, or rebukes, or of other accidental circumstances. Legionaries must act as members of one body. They serve the Legion best who moderate their own individuality and adapt themselves most completely and harmoniously to the system. Legionaries must see Christ not only in their fellow legionaries but in lay apostles of other organizations. Not only must they do nothing to hinder the work of others but they must lend positive assistance to that work provided it be worthy and their help be sought. What does it matter who gets the credit as long as service is rendered to Christ?

SECOND PRINCIPLE: THROUGH MARY

That the baptized are members of Christ and become one body with Him is a fundamental Christian truth. Among the members of that Body, Mary is the most distinguished; she occupies the first place after the Head. She is the Mother of both the Head and the members and performs a function that is intimately bound up with the life of the whole Body. In the divine plan Mary’s role is to conceive and bring forth the Mystical Body by the power of the Holy Spirit. Subject to her maternal care the members grow up in Christ and attain their perfection. Her office is to
THE LEGION OF MARY

nourish and care for each member of the Mystical Body. She is a most diligent and loving Mother. No one can aid his neighbor without taking part in her work. She was there first. It is her special and proper task. We can understand then why the Legion would impress upon its legionaries that they do not really bring Mary to help them in their service to other members of the Mystical Body. It is Mary who summons them to assist her. She is the Mother of the whole Christ, the actual Christ and all His members. All that Mary does to any member of the Mystical Body she does to Christ. In mothering each member she shows her love for her Son. When legionaries take part in the apostolate in union with Mary, they understand that the Person of Our Lord is once again seen and served by Mary, His Mother.

DEVOTION TO MARY

The Legion encourages a devotion to Mary that is in keeping with the tremendous role God has entrusted to her. There is a world of difference between the Legion devotion and that which is commonly practiced. Most Catholics profess a special devotion to Mary. Certainly very many of them reverence her and frequently pray to her for help. But few abandon themselves to her and try to live in a state of perpetual consecration to her. It is this kind of devotion that the Legion holds up to its members. Essentially it is to do all things in union with and in dependence on Mary.

The three privileges which the Legion especially honors throw light on the nature of its devotion. First, there is the privilege of Mary as Mediatrix of All Graces. "The Legion's trust in her is boundless, knowing that by the ordinance of God, her power is without limit. All that He could give to Mary, He has given to her. All that she was capable of receiving, she has received in plenitude. For us God has constituted her a special means of grace. Operating in union with her, we approach Him more effectively and hence win grace more freely. Indeed we place ourselves in the very floodtide of grace, for she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, she is the channel of every grace Jesus Christ has won. We receive nothing which we do not owe to a positive intervention on her part. She does not content herself with transmitting all: she obtains all for us." (Handbook p. 11)

A second aspect of Legion devotion is towards the Immaculate Conception. Again, I quote the Handbook. 

5
"At the very first meeting, the members prayed and deliberated around a little altar of the Immaculate Conception, identical with that which now forms the center of Legion meetings. Moreover, the very first breath of the Legion may be said to have been drawn in honor of this privilege of Our Lady, which formed the preparation for all the dignities and all the privileges afterwards accorded to her. . . .

'I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel'. (Gen. 3:15) To these words addressed to Satan by Almighty God the Legion turns as the source of its confidence and strength in its warfare with sin. It aims with all its heart to become in fullness the seed, the children of Mary, for there is the pledge of victory. In the measure that it makes her more and more its mother, is the Legion's enmity with the powers of evil intensified and victory made more complete."

(Handbook, p. 12)

A third aspect of Legion devotion to Mary is the special honoring of her as our real Mother. "Truly her children, we must deport ourselves as such, and indeed as very little children; dependent entirely upon her. . . . Incessantly must the legionary dwell upon the reality of Mary's Motherhood of us so that the faith in her maternal role will expand and urge us on to practices which will translate into action the firmness of our conviction and the ardor of our love, and make us worthy children of so true a mother." (Handbook, p. 13)

Devotion to Mary is meaningless if it is not apostolic. There can be no real union with her without participation in her essential function of motherhood of souls. True devotion to Mary includes service to souls. The separation between a so-called devotion to Mary and apostolic action is at the bottom of a certain coldness and hardness which is characteristic of far too many devout souls. Hence the Legion is not built upon two principles, Mary and apostleship, but upon the one principle, Mary, which embraces apostleship and (rightly understood) the entire Christian life.

IMITATION OF MARY

The object of the Legion is the sanctification of its members. It would form all legionaries into other Marys. It is especially the 'little virtues' of Mary that the Legion holds before its members for imitation. "Especially does the Legion aspire after her profound humility, her perfect obedience,
her angelical sweetness, her continual prayer, her universal mortification, her altogether spotless purity, her heroic patience, her heavenly wisdom, her self-sacrificing courageous love of God, and above all, her faith.”

(Handbook p. 4)

The ‘little virtues’ of Mary are reflected in such Legion directives as the following:

“Strive to win others to the Christian way of life by love and kindness and by a quiet, discreet example which does not humiliate them and does not constrain them to come in”.

“Never use a note of sternness. Others may succeed by stronger methods but for the legionary there is only the way of gentleness and sweetness.”

Legionaries should act as Mary would act. The Handbook explains that legionaries

will not sit in judgment on their neighbor;
will not set up their own standards of thought and conduct as standards that must be conformed to by all;
will not assume that persons are necessarily unworthy who differ from the legionaries in various ways, who refuse to see them, or who even oppose them;
will not criticize even those persons whose actions seem open to criticism.

An organization which has for its purpose to mirror Mary will do its work “quietly, unobtrusively, delicately.” Its work will be “essentially a hidden one.” There will be no want of “simplicity in dress and accent” because otherwise a barrier might arise between the visitors and the people they visit. For entry into its rank there will be no “social or political or national or color discrimination. Fitness for membership will be the only test.” Toward other organizations there will be “a spirit of readiness to give unstinted co-operation and assistance, desirous only that good may be done.” In imitation of the humble “Handmaid of the Lord” towards the Church and its lawful ministers there will be “unreserved loyalty and loving obedience.”

Marian love and sympathy must be more than an appearance. “It must be able to stand up to the tests that real friendships can bear. This will frequently involve little mortifications. To greet in fashionable surroundings, one who a little while before was the subject of one’s visita-
tion in a jail, to be seen walking with bedraggled persons, to grasp warmly the hand which is coated with grime, to partake of a proffered meal in a very poor or dirty home, may be to some difficult; but if avoided, the attitude of friendship is shown to have been a pretence, the contact breaks, and the soul that was being lifted sinks back in disillusion. At the heart of all really fruitful work must be the willingness to give oneself entirely. Without this readiness, one’s service has no substance.” (Handbook p. 7)

A self-sacrificing courageous love of God in imitation of Mary may involve the approaching of “many who would prefer to remain remote from good influences, and who will manifest their distaste for receiving a visit from those whose mission is good, not evil.” In the works of the apostolate there is ample opportunity for the practice of a quiet but true heroism. Recent events in China have proved that “little souls” schooled in the virtues of Mary can rise, when the occasion demands, to a love greater than which no man has, that he lay down his life for his friends.

A SCHOOL OF MARY

The Legion is a school of Mary. Through its Handbook and in the very exercise of its apostolate the legion would bring home to its members the necessary role of Mary in God’s plan for souls. It would instill in them a devotion that is in harmony with that role. It would stamp upon them a likeness to Mary so that they become not only in name, but in fact, a Legion of Mary.

Father Faber complained that Mary is not half enough known or loved, with sad results for souls.

“Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It has no faith in itself. Hence it is that Jesus is not loved, that heretics are not converted, that the Church is not exalted; that souls, which might be saints, wither and dwindle; that the sacraments are not rightly frequented, or souls enthusiastically evangelized. Jesus is obscured because Mary is kept in the background. Thousands of souls perish because Mary is withheld from them. It is the miserable unworthy shadow which we call our devotion to the Blessed Virgin, that is the cause of all these wants and blights, these evils and omissions and declines.
Yet if we are to believe the revelation of the saints, God is pressing for a greater, a wider, a stronger, quite another devotion to His Blessed Mother. . . . Let a man but try it for himself, and his surprise at the graces it brings with it, and the transformations it causes in his soul, will soon convince him of its otherwise incredible efficacy as a means for the salvation of men, and for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ.

The experience of the Legion confirms the truth of these words. For a little more than thirty years now, the Legion has worked at its great purpose to bring Mary to the world. It has brought to its own members and through them to others a devotion that is not low and thin and poor but a greater, a wider, a stronger, and quite another devotion to Mary. The souls of legionaries have been transformed by it. More and more the Christian world is learning of the almost incredible efficacy of 'bringing Mary to souls that souls might be brought to Christ'. The world ought not be surprised. God stated in the beginning: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: She shall crush thy head and thou shall lie in wait for her heel."
MARIAN REPRINTS

No. 1 — *Mary’s Place in Our Life* — Rev. T. J. Jorgenson, S.J.
No. 2 — *The Meaning of Mary* — Lois Schumacher
Litany for Our Times — Robert L. Reynolds
No. 3 — *Mary and the Apostolate* — Rev. Emil Neubert, S.M.
No. 4 — *The Imitation of Mary* — Rev. Placid Huault, S.M.
No. 5 — *Mary, Assumed into Heaven* — Rev. Lawrence Everett, C.SS.R.
No. 6 — *Fatima — In Battle Array* — Rev. Joseph Agius, O.P.
No. 7 — *Men, Mary, and Manliness* — Ed Willock
No. 8 — *Mary, Conceived without Sin* — Rev. Francis Connell, C.SS.R.
No. 9 — *Russia and the Immaculate Heart* — Pius XII
No. 10 — *Mary, Our Inspiration to Action* — Bro. Robert Knopp, S.M.
No. 11 — *Sign in the Heavens* — Rev. James O’Mahony, O.F.M.Cap.
No. 12 — *Soul of Marian Devotion* — Rev. Edmund Baumeister, S.M.
No. 13 — *The Assumption and the Modern World* — Bishop Fulton J. Sheen
No. 14 — *Mother and Helpmate of Christ* — Rev. James Egan, O.P.
No. 15 — *Mary, Patroness of Catholic Action* — John J. Griffin
No. 16 — *The Mystery of Mary* — Rev. Emil Neubert, S.M.
No. 17 — *The Blessed Virgin in the Liturgy* — Rev. Clifford Howell, S.J.
No. 18 — *Our Lady of Russia* — Catherine de Hueck Doherty
No. 19 — *The Witness of Our Lady* — Archbishop Alban Goodier, S.J.
No. 20 — *Fulgens Corona* — Pius XII
No. 21 — *The Immaculate Conception and the United States* — Rev. Ralph Ohlmann, O.F.M.
No. 22 — *The Immaculate Conception and the Apostolate* — Rev. Philip Hoelle, S.M.
No. 23 — *Ineffabilis Deus* — Pius IX
No. 24 — *Mary’s Apostolic Role in History* — Bro. John Totten, S.M.
No. 25 — *Ad Diem Illum* — Pius X
No. 26 — *Know Your Mother Better: a Marian bibliography* — Bro. Stanley Mathews, S.M.
No. 27 — *The Immaculate Conception and Mary’s Death* — Rev. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.
No. 28 — *Immaculate Mother of God* — James Francis Cardinal McIntyre
No. 29 — *The Wisdom of Our Lady* — Gerald Vann, O. P.
No. 30 — *Ad Caeli Reginam* — Pius XII
No. 31 — *Our Lady at Home* — Richard T. A. Murphy, O.P.
No. 32 — *The Brown Scapular of Carmel* — Henry M. Esteve, O. Carm.
No. 33 — *Mary’s Role in the Mystical Body* — Thomas A. Stanley, S. M.
No. 34 — *Mary and the Fullness of Time* — Jean Danielou, S. J.
No. 35 — *Protestantism and the Mother of God* — Kenneth F. Dougherty, S. A.