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# The Legion of Mary

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## THE LEGION OF MARY

*Bro. Lawrence Scrivani, S.M.\**

### 1. Historical Perspective

Perspective concerns how objects relate to each other to form a total picture in depth. History adds the dimension of time to that perception. In this case, we are concerned with the Legion of Mary and what we can learn about Marian spirituality from the historic experience of the Legion.<sup>1</sup> We can gain insight by tracing the way the essential idea of the Legion of Mary has developed since its foundation in 1921, through the Second Vatican Council and to the present. Compared to other movements in the Church, the Legion's history is relatively short: it occurred within the lifetimes of many still living. Nevertheless, the scope of this paper precludes giving any but the briefest outline of it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The term *spirituality* appears frequently in current popular culture and the New Age religious movements, meaning anything from pantheistic union to a subjective euphoric state. Our understanding of spirituality is that as outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#954). Spirituality is the encounter between Christ and the believer experienced in the interior powers of the soul but effected in the objective medium of the Church, through its sacraments, its forms of prayer and piety, and in its Communion of Saints.

<sup>2</sup>There is no comprehensive history of the Legion. One must piece it together from periodicals, a few book-length inhouse publications, archival records, tape-recorded interviews with Legionary figures, and a few useful web sites. Among these are some of the following.

*Periodicals:* Principal among them is the *Maria Legionis*, which is the only official periodical of the Legion's governing Council. This magazine first appeared in 1937. The American edition began in 1980 when the Philadelphia governing Council provided a North American supplement to the articles originating from Dublin. This periodical is not indexed, but contains many articles scattered throughout about the history of the Legion. An important article about the Legion in the United States is found in *The Ecclesiastical Review* 86/3 (March 1932): 244-259, "Is This the Long

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No one had the intention to establish the Legion of Mary. It began when fifteen lay people, already active in the Church, wished to commit themselves to the program outlined in St. Louis Grignion de Montfort's *True Devotion*. One of these, Mr. Frank Duff, exercised a leading role among them. Their first meeting on the evening of September 7, 1921, is considered the founding of the Legion of Mary.<sup>3</sup> The character and struc-

Looked for Church Society?" (by Father Joseph P. Donovan, C.M., J.C.D., of Kenrick Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri). Father Donovan is credited with promoting the Legion's extension to the United States. For a discussion by Frank Duff about the foundation of the Legion, confer "Frank Duff Talks about the Roots of the Legion of Mary," *Queen of All Hearts* 54/1 (May-June 2003): 4-7. Finally, there is the "Special Legion of Mary Issue" of *The Immaculate* 19/1 (August 1968), from the Conventual Franciscan Friars at the Marytown Press, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

*Books:* Regarding the mass conversion of prostitutes in Bentley Place, Dublin's red-light district, see Frank Duff, *Miracles on Tap: The Incredible Transformation of Dublin's "Bentley Place"* (Bayshore, N.Y.: Montfort Publications, 1961). For the remarkable work of Legionary Edel Quinn in establishing the Legion in British East Africa, see Leon-Joseph Suenens, *Edel Quinn: Envoy of the Legion of Mary to Africa* (Dublin: Falon, 1954). For a first-person account by a Legionary in China during the Proletarian Cultural Revolution, see Wang Xiaoling, *Many Waters: Experiences of a Chinese Woman Prisoner of Conscience*, Eng. trans. (Hong Kong: Caritas Printing Training Center, 1988).

*Archival Sources:* Most useful are the annual reports that each governing council of the Legion is obligated by the *Handbook* to submit to the council immediately superior to it. Thus a *curia* or a *comitium* (diocesan-level councils) submits its report to a *senatus* (regional or national level) and a *senatus* in turn to the *Conclitium* (international headquarters). Occasionally, copies are sent to the local dioceses and can be read at their archives. At the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco are the materials describing the role of B. P. Oliver, a local financier, in bringing the Legion to the United States, beginning in 1934, by subsidizing its very first "envoys."

*Web Sites:* The official web site operated by the international governing council of the Legion is [www.legion-of-mary.ie](http://www.legion-of-mary.ie). There are several unofficial web sites operated by Legion councils or supporters in the United States which provide some historical information, but these often contain personal recollections and are not always accurate. Among these are: [www.legionofmary.org](http://www.legionofmary.org) and [www.legionsaints.org](http://www.legionsaints.org). (One must take care not to be confused with web sites about a rock band entitled "Legion of Mary" that was established by Jerry Garcia in San Francisco in 1974. That band has been revived under the same name and continues to perform. The San Francisco governing council of the Legion visited the band in 1974 and concluded that it was not an offensive use of the name. In its turn, the current revival of the rock band carries on its web site [<http://members.aol.com/LoMhome/links1.gif>] a promotion for "a nice site featuring the Catholic lay organization Legion of Mary.")

<sup>3</sup>The man generally described as the "founder" of the Legion is Frank Duff (1889-1980). A native of Dublin, Mr. Duff was among the fifteen people who met on

ture of this unintended association developed one step at a time without an overall plan. But by 1927 (only six years later), it was in most particulars the Legion as it is known today. The steps by which its worldwide dispersion occurred within the space of about thirty years were similarly without premeditation.<sup>4</sup> Even more stunning is the simple fact that the Legion has had no endowment or regular income to support the activities of its members.

Three characteristics marking the Legion's development suggest the influence of Providence. First, that it was unplanned and unintended; second, that it had no material means of support; and third, that it was seemingly unstoppable. While these qualities might appear in other historical mass movements, the Legion is marked also by the Church's recognition of the holiness of several of its members (its martyrs, its Servants of God) and by "mass conversions." The members of the Legion obtained no material or social advantage from their membership or their activities. They were motivated solely by religious considerations. By its own rules, the Legion is forbidden from any kind of activity with political implications. Its identity is based on its religious foundations. According to its founding documents, the defining element of the Legion's self-understanding

that first night at the Myra House on Francis Street in Dublin. This event is considered the founding event. Mr. Duff left his regular employment in the Irish civil service in 1933 to devote himself full time to the direction of the Legion, which by that year had spread to five continents. Mr. Duff is considered to be the principal author of the *Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, which serves as the constitutions of the Legion.

<sup>4</sup>The first extension of the Legion outside of Ireland was to Scotland in 1928, then to England in 1929. In 1931 by coincidence, the Legion spread east to India and west to the United States. Between 1936 and 1945, the Legion spread all throughout British East Africa and the islands of the Indian Ocean, including some French-speaking ones. In 1937, one year after entering Africa, the Legion came to China. By 1950, despite World War II and the Communist take-over, there were 2000 cells in that country. Only after World War II did extension come to Continental Europe and to South America. By the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Legion had spread to all of the continents, had enrolled hundreds of thousands of members, and had obtained its first martyrs. All this is the more remarkable when one considers that the Legion has had no money and no property.

is described as “practical union with Mary.” It is important to discover how the Legion understands this term.

## 2. The Essence of the Legion: “Practical Union with Mary”

Conventional notions of Marian devotion do not convey what the Legion understands as “practical union” with Mary. For example, this practical union is not achieved because its members recite the rosary at their weekly meetings. Nor does it occur because the Legion maintains a pious attitude toward the person of Mary, or because Mary is regarded as a symbol, image, or archetype. The immediate occasion for the founding of the Legion was the desire to put into practice the principles of Grignion de Montfort’s *True Devotion*, but that was simply the starting point. The spiritual and doctrinal system of the Legion began at that point but advanced in unforeseen ways—steps, taken one at a time in response to practical needs, inspired by faith.

The Legion is not linked in any direct way to a Marian apparition or other extraordinary manifestation. The Fatima events occurred only four years previous to the Legion’s founding, but there is no evidence that the initial members had any direct knowledge of these events or that they were influenced by them.

From practical experience and guided by faith, there emerged gradually a coherent perspective that Frank Duff referred to as the “Legionary point of view.” He described this perspective as the habit of viewing everyday life in the spirit of faith. One does not know in advance what can be achieved. One simply begins moving toward an evangelical goal, taking each step as it comes. Duff spoke also of the “symbolic action”—a deed performed in the spirit of faith, in the belief that nothing is impossible to God. A great achievement like the “mass conversion” which occurred at Bentley Place<sup>5</sup> did not occur as

<sup>5</sup>The “mass conversion” which occurred at Bentley Place—a district of Dublin “where prostitution was rife”—is described in Frank Duff’s *Walking with Mary* (Glasgow: J. S. Burns, 1956), 26.

the result of a planned effort with prearranged capitalization. It began as a simple act of charity, within the Legion's capacity, of visiting a young woman who had sought lodging for a while in the hostel operated by Legion volunteers, but who then had disappeared into the black hole of Bentley Place. Arranging that visit took some doing and it did not go as first planned. That it developed by unforeseeable steps into a campaign with lasting results is a demonstration of the Legion's dictum that any major impossibility can be divided into a series of minor possibilities such that one can always take the first step. This strategy is what Frank Duff would call "Marian audacity." He calls this audacity *Marian* because the spirit of the Legion is intended to be the spirit of Mary herself, especially her spirit of faith. Inspired by the faith of Mary, her Legion considers any work possible—without considering its "impossibility"—because to God all things are possible. This is an application to the Legionary's everyday life of the words addressed by the angel to Mary at her Annunciation: "For nothing is impossible to God" (Luke 1:37). We begin to understand how the Legion can use a purely religious motivation to produce social influence without becoming political. But there remains the need to understand how "union with Mary" can be described as a "practical union."

The Legion seeks a union with Mary that is acquired through action rather than through theory or ideals. This union begins with a formula of prayers recited before an image or statue of Mary. Guided by doctrine and by a conscious intention to imitate her virtues, one then passes beyond these steps to undertake action in union with her. This action is said to be "in the spirit of faith" because, by faith, it is in the context of the Communion of Saints. Through this Communion, the barriers of time and space dissolve and Mary is once again present to the Legionary as she was to her Son during his earthly life. "Christian spirituality" is the encounter within the soul between Christ and the believer, brought about through the mediation of the Church, the Communion of Saints. This union is experienced inwardly to be real in its effect. Its nature is well described by a formula read aloud to all legionaries at the first

meeting of each month. The formula is called the third standing instruction:

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.<sup>6</sup>

A little explanation is needed to make clear how the Legionary is taught to understand these words. "A substantial active Legionary work" means a work undertaken corporately by the Legion which must always include face-to-face evangelization.<sup>7</sup> These works are always assigned to more than one person so that the promise of Christ can be effected: "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."<sup>8</sup> Further, in Legionary theology, Mary is presented always in the context of the Communion of Saints related to her Son, to the Holy Spirit, to one's fellow believer and to the soul to be saved.

<sup>6</sup>The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary (1993 ed.), 109. The *Handbook* is published by the *Conclltum Legionis Mariae* located in Dublin. The first edition printed in 1928 is described as a pamphlet. In 1937, a new edition was released. A so-called "American edition" exists for 1940, 1941, 1944, 1947, 1949, 1953, and 1955. It appears these simply were printed in the United States. The edition for 1955 bears the impression "Seventh American Edition." It was printed in Louisville, Kentucky. The editions of 1969, 1975, and 1993 are printed once again in Dublin. The edition of 1955 is notable because, since then, the photographic illustrations in the *Handbook* have featured Chinese legionaries. Prior to that edition all the photos were taken in Dublin. But word reached the outside world in 1954 of the first Legion martyrs in China. In deference to that sacrifice, Duff ordered the change. The most recent edition remains that of 1993. It is very possible that more editions exist than those listed above.

<sup>7</sup>The Legion is forbidden by its own rules to undertake any work of material relief or to collect money for any purpose or to allow itself to be used for any political purpose. The *Handbook* is quite insistent about these prohibitions, based on past experience, and explains the reasons in detail. The following dictum is printed in boldface type: "Material relief may be to other societies a key which opens. It is the key with which the Legion locks itself out" (p. 291). The basic principle is that the mission of the Legion is to share spiritual goods. Legionaries will not accomplish spiritual good by giving material relief because "thereby they break their rule." Further, it is said that the Legion has no special grace for relief work, whereas other groups, such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, do.

<sup>8</sup>Matt. 18:20.

Thus the standing instruction indicates 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.” By this formula, the Legionary is taught what it means to undertake practical actions “in the spirit of faith and in union with Mary.” The Legionary learns from experience that the union spoken of cannot be meant as simply sentimental or figurative because it occurs in the context of an activity that is often a challenge beyond one’s ability. Often the conditions of the work are emotionally threatening, not comforting. The Legionary senses the accomplishment of difficult works with an unexpected success that cannot be accounted for by one’s own ability. The Legion system presupposes the presence of Mary, an active participant, “who with maternal love, assists at the birth and development of the sons and daughters of Mother Church.”<sup>9</sup>

But we are getting ahead of events. The preceding description of “practical union with Mary,” the motivating force of the Legion, is a description of the Legion as it operated on the eve of the Second Vatican Council. The influence of the Council on the Legion must now be considered.

### **3. Vatican II and the Legion**

At the Council’s opening in 1962, the Legion had been in existence forty-one years and was still under the direction of its founding members. Frank Duff attended the second session of the Council as a lay observer. The Legion had developed under the direction of laity living entirely within the period following World War I. Some developments within the Legion parallel those which would become part of the Council. In several of its initiatives, the Legion seems to have anticipated the Council. Four that immediately come to mind are, first, the universal call to holiness embracing all, including those in the lay state; second, the laity’s formal role in the mission of evangelization; third, the connection between personal faith and social action; finally, relating all the foregoing elements to a comprehensive theology of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

<sup>9</sup>John-Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 44.

The Council's Decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* states the immediate end of lay apostolic organizations to be "the evangelization and sanctification of men and the Christian formation of their conscience, so as to enable them to imbue with the Gospel spirit the various social groups and environments." The same decree further recommends the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, as "the perfect model of this apostolic spiritual life."<sup>10</sup> These two passages were salient features of the Legion.

Nevertheless, in 1965 and in 1966, the Legion headquarters wrote to the Vatican inquiring whether there was a need to "up-date" the Legion according to the directives of the Council. What they received in response were two letters with some remarkable passages. Both bear the signature of Cardinal Cicognani as Papal Secretary of State. In the first letter, January 6, 1965, the cardinal wrote "His Holiness desires to take this occasion to send His Message of praise and encouragement to the Legion of Mary, which, has by now extended its beneficent action to every continent."<sup>11</sup> The second letter, June 2, 1966, responds, "With regard to the Constitutions 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."<sup>12</sup> Although the Vatican indicated that there was no need to alter the *Official Handbook*, Frank Duff inserted relevant portions of the Council documents into its pages. While these additions produced no fundamental changes to Legion principles, they did strengthen them in significant ways.

A comparison of the editions of the *Official Handbook* from before with those after the Council reveals many interpolations taken from Vatican II's documents. The very first page quotes the dramatic proclamation of *Gaudium et Spes*: "The whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil,

<sup>10</sup>*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nos. 20 and 4.

<sup>11</sup>Segreteria di Stato di Sua Santità, "Paul VI to the Legion of Mary," protocol no. 34614, January 6, 1965, as reprinted in the *Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (1993 ed.), 332-333.

<sup>12</sup>*The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (1969 ed.), [viii].

between light and darkness" (no. 13). Scattered throughout the pages of the *Handbook* are paragraph-long quotations from church documents—so many that a special index, "Documents of the Magisterium," is provided so the reader can have direct access to the sixty-one quotations from conciliar and post-conciliar documents. An "Index of Papal References" is provided for the forty-seven excerpts from the writings of the popes from Leo XIII to John-Paul II.

An analysis of the new content of the *Handbook* reveals a significant increase in the entries presenting Marian theology.<sup>13</sup> Most significant is the new entry "Mary, Mother of the Church," with an excerpt from the discourse of Pope Paul VI at the end of the Council's third session in which he proclaimed "the most holy Mary to be the Mother of the Church." An appendix added to the *Handbook* presents five paragraphs from chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* subtitled "On the Blessed Virgin and the Church." These paragraphs begin with an affirmation that Christ is the one Mediator and that Mary's "salvific influence" is entirely dependent upon His mediation. Because she continues to care for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth, she is invoked under the titles of "Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix,

<sup>13</sup>A comparison of editions of the *Handbook* from before the council (1955 edition) and after the council (1975 edition) reveals a significant increase in the number of entries in the index relating to "Mary." There are twenty-eight in the earlier edition, and thirty-five in the later. The added entries in the later edition include topics featured in council documents. The title "Mother of the Church" is listed together with a quotation from Pope Paul VI's address in which he proclaims that title and relevant articles (60 through 62) of *Lumen Gentium*. An added entry for "Mother of Unity" presents an ecumenical thrust and cites Paul VI's statement that "Mary is not a barrier." It includes a lengthy reply to the arguments to the contrary. A third new entry is the patristic formula "New Eve" in a lengthy appendix (number 7) entitled "Marian Synthesis." This synthesis is a comprehensive treatment of Marian theology drawing fully on chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*. An accompanying appendix (number 8) quotes the text verbatim of articles 60 to 62 and 65 of *Lumen Gentium*. Mary is presented as the New Eve in consort with the New Adam, her Son Jesus Christ. A fourth addition is "Mary and the Holy Trinity" which is developed in a chapter (number 29) entitled "The Legion and the Trinity." And finally there is an added entry for "Mary and the Angels" which develops the title "Queen of the Angels" and the role of the angels at the Annunciation.

and Mediatrix." The last title is of special importance to the Legion: from its origin, it made its own the invocation "Mary Immaculate, Mediatrix of all Graces."

In another new entry "Mary, Mother of Unity," the *Handbook* cites *Lumen Gentium* on the universal motherhood of Mary (nos. 53, 65). It also cites the words of Pope Paul VI that Mary is the Mother of Unity "because of her maternal and unifying duty towards all the members of the human family." Finally, the section concludes with an excerpt from *Marialis Cultus* (35) proposing Mary as worthy of imitation because she was "the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples."

The lengthiest of the post-conciliar entries on Mary is an appendix, "Synthesis: Mary's Co-operation in the Total Scheme of Salvation." In a later edition of the *Handbook* this section is entitled "A Marian Synthesis: Presenting in Briefest Possible Compass the Stupendous Role of Co-operation Given to Mary in the Total Scheme of Salvation." This synthesis is cast in the form of a meditation addressed to "Our Queen, our Mother." This construction serves two roles simultaneously: first, it is an act of devotion to Mary in recognition of the immense obligation the redeemed owe to her, and, second, it is a recapitulation, in four short paragraphs, of the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*. The recapitulation concludes with a restatement of the intention that "We must appreciate what you have done, and through our faith, our love, our service, attempt an adequate acknowledgment." The language conveys a tone of fealty based on personal obligation. It is addressed directly to Mary. This tone is important because, while it was typical of preconciliar Catholic devotion to Mary, it may appear contrary to currents and attitudes that emerged after the Council.

In assessing the impact of the Council on the Legion, the overall impression given by the *Handbook* is one of continuity in the development of doctrine. The Legion perceives an unbroken continuity from pre-conciliar developments through the documents of the Council. From this perspective one might go so far as to claim that the Legion itself represents a practical expression of the doctrinal teaching of the Council. True, the starting point for Legion spirituality at the time of its foundation was the *True Devotion* of Grignon de Montfort,

certainly pre-conciliar in its spirit and style. But the Legion developed a substantial progression to its original approach to Marian devotion.<sup>14</sup> The Legion's contribution to Marian theology may have been ratified, so to speak, at the Council when Paul VI made his controversial declaration of a new Marian title: "Mary, Mother of the Church." In making this proclamation, Paul VI described the work of the Council as a first:

This is the first time that an Ecumenical Council has presented so vast a synthesis of the Catholic doctrine on the place which Mary Most Holy occupies in the Mystery of Christ and the Church. But such is in conformity with the purpose, which the Council had proposed to itself, of manifesting the face of Holy Church. For Mary is joined to the Church in the very closest way.<sup>15</sup>

The Legion anticipated this grand "synthesis" of doctrine on the place of Mary, as well as the Council's statements on the universal call to holiness and on the participation of the laity in evangelization. Nevertheless, questions were to arise after the Council about the "Legionary devotion to Mary." So acute was the controversy that a post-conciliar edition of the *Handbook* referred to "what is sometimes, but incorrectly, called the Legionary devotion to Mary. It is no property of the Legion which has only learned it from the Church."

#### **4. Controversy since the Vatican Council**

The Council ended in 1965, and already in 1966, Frank Duff felt compelled publicly to answer those calling for the "updating" of the Legion.<sup>16</sup> Duff summarized the main objections: that

<sup>14</sup>For example, beginning in 1918, Frank Duff tried to read *True Devotion* at a friend's request, but was unable to do so because of its style. Only after the eighth reading did Duff conclude, "De Montfort is right and I am wrong." Frank Duff learned from reading Grignion de Montfort the role of the Holy Spirit and from this conviction came the Legion's first meeting. However, Duff would say later, "De Montfort didn't go far enough. He didn't make explicit the evangelization dimension." The connection between devotion and evangelization is the Legion's contribution to Marian theology.

<sup>15</sup>Paul VI, Concluding Address to the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, 21 November 1964.

<sup>16</sup>"Updating the Legion," *The Immaculate* (Franciscan Marytown Press), 19/1 (August 1968). This article combines the text of two public addresses made by Frank Duff to Legion audiences in 1966 and in 1967. It is the source for all the quotations cited subsequently in this paragraph.

the Legion founded its work upon an extravagant notion of the Blessed Virgin that was both unattractive to the laity and unacceptable to ecclesiastical authority; that it wasted too much of the meeting time on lengthy prayers (such as the rosary) which could better be spent in work; that it assigned new members immediately to approach souls without preparatory classes or discussions. Finally, that the Legion's stated goal of "converting" others was exclusionist, outmoded in an age of ecumenism and irrelevant to modern social needs. In answer, Duff pointed out that these criticisms arose at a time when, "all the original ideas of the Legion had been so completely justified, not merely by successful practice but by Council legislation." He insisted with the Council documents that Mary is no barrier but rather the necessary Mother: "I cannot sufficiently stress the importance of this consideration—that the right outlook on Mary is the well-spring of everything. The waters of life flow up from it into the Legion and out to the world."

He also warned about the consequences of caving-in to the pressure to minimize Mary. He predicted that once removed from the apostolic program, it would only be a matter of time before she is removed as well from the lives of members. When prayer is not given its proper place there will be an absorption in the social and economic matters with a tendency to become political. He charged Legionaries with the responsibility, "to see that the Legion is not destroyed and that it is not too much tormented."

Duff's concern about the substitution of social concerns for apostolic ones deserves more attention. While he was alive, Duff never tired of pointing out that the only real basis for a lasting social transformation is personal holiness. Person-to-person evangelization is one of the secret strengths of the Legion. It is primary and essential:

We've got our priorities wrong. Priority number one for a Catholic is to be an apostle. You can't do your neighbor a bigger favor than to bring him into a deeper understanding of his faith. The Legion not only inspires faith but also gives a balanced, accurate presentation of Catholicism. Devotional exercises alone do not teach religion.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Statement made by Frank Duff to a group of legionaries visiting from the United States and reported in *Maria Legionis* magazine.

But what of the charge that the Legion sends its members out unprepared? Does a candidate need years of study? Duff's response was that the apostolate is not the radiation of knowledge but the imparting of conviction. What is important is the intensity of one's conviction. Each convinced Catholic, however imperfect his knowledge, possesses the capacity to convey this conviction to the mind of the person whom he seeks to influence. But the average Catholic will not do so unless moved by a strong impetus, such as the force of an organization informed with the spirit of faith. Similarly, the discipline of the Legion system, once it is willingly assumed, overcomes the deficiencies of personality and the social pressures that defeat and deflect the usual lay groups from apostolic and spiritual ends. Father Aedan McGrath, a missionary to China, observed the Legion method in action. He described it as "learning by doing, the apprentice method, going out two-by-two, doing and reporting, then emulating the success of the others: there is no method of evangelization that comes near to the Legion of Mary."

The passage of time has not muted the four general criticisms made about the Legion—namely, that it is improperly Marian, that it is too rigid in its regimen, that it is not ecumenical-minded, and that it is not involved in the social apostolate because it focuses on evangelization.<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of history it becomes clearer that the source of these objections is rooted in a clash between two attitudes or states of mind regarding the proper way of understanding the Second Vatican Council. While the Legion sees continuity in the development of doctrine, the critics of the Legion see in the Council a point of departure that replaces all that went before it with whatever has emerged since. For these critics, the continued existence of the Legion assumes the nature of an affront.<sup>19</sup> There is a ten-

<sup>18</sup>For example, see "The Legion of Mary in the Church of Today," by Thomas B. Falls, S.T.D., Ph.D., which summarizes many of the same objections cited by Duff in 1966. It is available at [www.the-pope.com/mary.html](http://www.the-pope.com/mary.html).

<sup>19</sup>What exactly has happened to the Legion since Vatican II does not seem to be documented comprehensively in one place. The picture worldwide is one of contin-

dency after the Council toward a rationalization of Catholic theology, of Catholic worship and of Catholic morals—a transformation of the doctrines of faith into abstractions. The Legion contradicts this tendency.

The historical experience of the Legion helps us to understand how it might be possible to speak of a “Marian dimension” to one’s Christian spirituality. In its nuclear meaning the word *dimension* refers to a measurable extent of a physical property such as length, width or depth. By figurative extension we can speak of the “Marian dimension” of spirituality as the extent to which Mary imparts her personal character to something, thus becoming its measure. By “practical union with Mary,” legionaries seek not only to give her a place in their lives of grace but also to be united with her in common action so that she becomes the measure of their Christian life. In this way the Legion shows us how one can speak genuinely of a spirituality that is Marian, just as legitimately as one might speak of an “Ignatian spirituality” or a “Carmelite spirituality.” Marian spirituality in its simplest terms is the way of Mary. Yes, all authentic Christian spiritualities will have a place for Mary, but not all of them will approach her in the same way. In the approach taken by the Legion, Mary has a personal role, not a

ued extension and development, after a decline during the years following the 1960s. This picture is not the same in all countries. For example, in the United States there has been a steady decline in numbers and a corresponding increase in average age. There was and is scattered evidence of hostility from some clergy. The Legion is designed to function in a parish and this cannot happen where the local clergy perceives the Legion to be an “outside group.”

Today one can hear frank acknowledgments from Legion officers that in Europe, the United States, and some non-Western countries such as Taiwan, the membership is aging and that it is very hard to recruit replacements to local cells when vacancies occur. The decline in vocations to the religious life parallels what is happening in the Legion. Is the Legion a bellwether for judging the spiritual depth of the lay faithful in a particular church? Father Aedan McGrath, S.S.C. (1906–2000), who brought the Legion to China, quotes Frank Duff as saying: “Three generations of a laity that is not apostolic becomes a non-church-going laity. Three generations of a non-church-going laity becomes a non-believing laity.”

symbolic one only. This role of Mary is that of a mother, and so it is uniquely personal to each individual, corresponding exactly to the union between child and mother in the natural order.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>For a description of this maternal role of Mary and its analogy to the order of nature, see John-Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 45. There is perhaps in academic theological circles an emotional distaste for those who would “talk to Mary rather than talk about her.” Therefore, it is deemed necessary to erect a conceptual firewall against those who, it is claimed, would venerate Mary apart from God. On the other hand, there are those who cannot understand the rational coldness of the intellectuals who describe their Mother in the order of grace as a model, an image, an archetype, but are content to relate to her through a set of abstract notions.