

Fear Not To Accept Mary

Mary is fundamental in the Legion. The Holy See, in the commendatory and delightful letter which it addressed to us on 6 January 1965, puts this fact under a spotlight so that all may look on it and no doubt learn. It declares: 'The spirit of the Legion, 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 characterised by an adamant confidence in the action of the Blessed Virgin.'

You will see that out of that striking recital of individual qualities the Holy Father picks one out and exhibits it to all, as it were, under that spotlight.

Among the doctrines of the Catholic Church, Mary does not of course occupy the same level of dignity as those relating to God himself, the Eucharist, etc., but she has been made absolutely necessary in the divine plan. Therefore we cannot afford to have any trucking about on this issue. Mary is fundamental. No one is compelled to enter the Legion. If they do enter, it is on the Legion terms, and surely this is reasonable. It is the

elemental right of every society to prescribe its terms for admission.

The idea of this primary role of Mary is enforced through the Legion Promise. Persons not willing to take the Promise must not be accepted on any account whatsoever. No matter what other qualities they may have, no matter what competence or anything else, they must not be taken into the Legion because they do not possess the requisite affinity for its membership. They may be all right in various other respects but the Legion judges them to be incompatibles. So I repeat that nobody unwilling to take the Promise is to be accepted into the ranks. Or if, having taken it, they subsequently change their minds they are honour bound to leave the Legion.

In looking on Mary in that way, the Legion is not inventing something special for its own use. Mary is likewise fundamental in the Church. These are times when efforts are being made to minimise her. But it must be pointed out, and should not have to be pointed out, that any diminution of her runs counter to Chapter 8 of the *De Ecclesia* decree. This chapter rises to heights in regard to Our Blessed Lady. It is to be specially noted that the *De Ecclesia* decree is more than an ordinary decree of the council. It entitles itself the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church. It is the first effort of the Catholic Church to set itself down on paper. So it can be held to occupy a position of eminence over and above the decrees, which concern themselves with mere departments of the Church's life.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter of the *De Ecclesia* decree and it may be described as its very culmination. It describes the history and the place of Mary in such glowing detail that readers, and not merely casual ones at that, are found likening it to the Legion handbook. The decree

must be pretty emphatic when they are led to make that comparison.

I cannot say in what way the decree could go further than it does. It describes Mary's predestination along with Jesus whose life she shares inseparably. The Redeemer only comes with her consent and she is his Helper and Co-operator in all that led up to Salvation, including the final decisive moments on Calvary.

As she played this vital role in the gaining of Redemption, so she takes an equivalent part in the administration of all that flows from the Redemption. She is styled Advocate and Mediatrix. She is the mother of every soul in the spiritual order and thus is necessary to their life and growth. Not only is she the mother of those in the Church, but also of all those outside it, of those that do not know her, and even of those who hate her. She is the Mother of the Church, the Mother of Unity, the Mother of Apostleship, for the decree insists that all apostleship is no more than an extension or a continuation of the care of her child Jesus. Those who undertake apostleship must look on her in that way and must place themselves under her care.

So talks the decree. And I could go on with that extraordinary litany of laudation of Mary, which it indulges in. For the first time in history Mary's role in grace has been thus specifically taught by a General Council. The loftiest declarations of the popes have been brought together, placed in that supreme setting of a decree, and obliged upon the Church. I would venture to call this Chapter 8 the Charter of Mary.

In those circumstances what are we to think of those who say that the council has played down Our Lady? One cannot regard this manifestation as healthy. It denotes a

contradictory and resistant attitude to a decree of a Great Council. But that behaviour is nothing new. Previous to the council such persons were found disregarding and even despising the ordinary Magisterium or teaching power of the Church. It is true that there is a difference between a council decree or an ex-Cathedra declaration and the ordinary teachings of the popes. That is, we must admit the theoretical possibility of an error creeping into the ordinary statements of a pope. Otherwise there would be no distinction at all between the infallible teaching and the ordinary teaching of the Church.

But remember this: the popes are talking out of the background of the Church, out of a background which goes back to the origin of Christianity. They are speaking according to its continuing and traditional teaching. Therefore it is inconceivable that any pope would step out of that approved line of tradition to venture on dubious or undetermined ground. Therefore people who indulge in depreciatory or disrespectful remarks about the Magisterium are open to doubts as to their Catholicity.

There is a further interesting and important aspect of this matter. It is a point, which was proposed during the council by that eminent Mariologist, Fr Charles Balic, OFM. He freely granted that there is a distinction between an infallible declaration and the common teaching of a pope. But he then proposed this consideration: If pope after pope, talking out of that background of tradition and dealing with an important doctrinal question, are found consistently teaching the same thing, is it possible for that teaching to be in error?

Fr Balic insists most emphatically that it could not be; that such a constant erroneous teaching would fatally compromise the teaching authority of the Church.

The good sense of that will strike us all when we think it out. Relate it to the doctrine concerning Our Lady. That doctrine is of primary importance in the Church. Pope after pope has taught the same things about her role in grace; that she is Mother and Mediatrix. Therefore, without the Great Council at all, that should be sufficient for all right-thinking Catholics as declaring her position.

And now the council enters in to endorse what the Magisterium had been saying. If there had been legitimate doubt before, it is now settled.

In a frantic effort to pervert the sense of the decree, some persons have suggested that its use of the term 'Mediatrix' instead of 'Mediatrix of All Graces' is a play-down. But it is to be noted that Our Lord is always styled 'Mediator' and not 'Mediator of All Graces'. Is that word 'Mediator' a play-down in his case also? You will agree that this argument is conclusive.

I further comment on the use of words. The two variants mean precisely the same thing. But as a theoretical proposition it could be argued that 'Mediatrix' is a preferable form to 'Mediatrix of All Graces'. Because Mary the Mediatrix is a parallel term to Jesus the Mediator. Secondly, one might imagine that 'Mediatrix of All Graces' only refers to the time after Calvary; that is to the administration of the graces won on Calvary. But that would be an incorrect supposition. For Mary's mediation began, as the decree describes, before the ages in the mind of the Blessed Trinity and it continued ever after. It is in force today. If we style Mary 'Mediatrix,' there can be no possible ambiguity as to when that office of hers began. She is Mediatrix where Jesus is Mediator. She is infinitely less than he, but made necessary and joined to him in every phase of his great Mediation.

Therefore, to claim that 'Mediatrice' is an expression of lesser scope and import than 'Mediatrice of All Graces' would denote either stupidity or worse.

I have been talking of the council legislation as endorsing that Marian behaviour of the Legion. Now I deal with the intriguing feature that the Legion always had that outlook. It has not been a case of a growing through the years, although of course there would be a greater appreciation of things as time went on and people learned more.

Then, where did the Legion get its Marian doctrine? The handbook tells us. It says that St Louis Marie de Montfort was undoubtedly the tutor of the Legion in this regard. So much so that he had to be placed among the Patrons of the Legion and this in spite of the fact that he is not of a piece with the other Patrons. He is out of their class and category altogether. All of them were connected with Our Lord's earthly mission, whereas De Montfort is a modern saint. However, the fact is that he played a unique part in the origin of the Legion. It was his treatise on Mary, which shaped the devotion of the Legion. He ranks as a basic in the Legion. As such he cannot be ignored. He must be respected. He must be understood.

But I would fear that he is somewhat out of fashion among us and is suffering neglect. We have perhaps caught a slight dose of the world-fever which is making a mockery of him and of what he stands for. I am led to wonder how serious this could be for the Legion. Could it possibly be held to denote a disintegrating of the legionary fabric? This sounds strong, but let us proceed to look back to the first pages of our history and see what they have to say on this subject.

They tell that St Louis Marie de Montfort announced Mary to the Legion. One might wonder what the Legion

would have been without him. I have often found myself analysing that proposition. Certainly the starting of the Legion was divinely held up for several years until de Montfort had provided the soil or atmosphere in which the Legion could take life. This is a suggestion of such importance to the Legion that it cannot be allowed to pass without explanation. Therefore into detail I must go.

The meeting out of which the Legion began was in existence for about three years before the Legion came forth from it. Why did the Legion not emerge sooner considering that all the other ingredients were present – just as much as when the Legion did emerge? Evidently something special had to intervene and was being unconsciously awaited. What was it?

Three Sundays, or to be exact, seventeen days before the Legion began, there was such a special occasion. It was a meeting summoned for the purpose of considering the True Devotion which had for some time past been a subject of curiosity and casual discussion. The whole of that special meeting was given up to a thorough examination of the True Devotion. At the end of it those present were reasonably aware of de Montfort's teaching on the subject of Mary's role in grace. They were convinced that she was our mother in the order of grace to a degree not less than, and actually more than, earthly mothers fulfil in regard to their young children. They saw that we must live the Christian life, including apostleship, in union with Mary.

That knowledge and conviction seemed to be the element which had been missing before, but which was divinely held to be necessary for the engendering of the Legion of Mary. Quickly something took place. There was a development as radical as would be produced by the pulling over of an electric switch. Within those

seventeen days – a period dictated by circumstances and which could not have been made shorter – the Legion had come into being out of events which did not seem to have any connection with that special meeting. Yet we know that they were connected really, invisibly and essentially. We are driven to believe that God had been awaiting the moment when the future legionaries would be filled with a certain idea of Mary, and that this was an absolute condition for the birth of the organisation. God and Our Lady wanted the Legion to commence as truly the Legion of Mary – a sort of Mystical Body of Our Lady. As such indeed was what took place.

One would expect that a special item in that first meeting for creating a new society would be the determining of its relation to Mary. For without formal suggestion to that effect, they did assemble under her auspices. Moreover other characteristics came in for minute consideration. For example, it was insisted that their attitude towards people was to be based on the doctrine of the Mystical Body. Likewise, the details of procedure in regard to the meeting and the work were gone into in detail. Then why was a similar degree of attention not given to the vital question of the place of Mary?

The answer to this is that those first legionaries had been present at the special meeting and they, so to speak, carried on from its discussion on the True Devotion. Though two weeks old, that discussion stood in their minds as agreed and settled business, and the remainder of the meeting reposed on it as upon a laid foundation. There was no debating in regard to their attitude towards Mary and her place in their apostolate. They accepted what de Montfort had told them on that subject. It was recognised and declared that they were only adding

themselves onto that maternal function which had been hers since the Incarnation. This idea, you will observe, is now proclaimed by the council.

Such was the atmosphere at that first gathering of the legionaries. They breathed it in and they lived in it. There was no disputation, no differing schools of thought. Their position had been determined seventeen days before. The duck just took to water and swam.

Apparently, as God saw things, it was St Louis Marie's teaching, which provided the correct mould for the Legion of Mary. This latter statement is of such consequence that we must face up to it. Is it true? Is it an exaggeration? Well, the statement is derived from what God actually did. It is not conjecture. It is a matter of history. He did not start the Legion until that missing ingredient had been supplied. The moment it was contained, the formula was complete and the Legion was born. To judge that such a seemingly providential line of action, subsequently attended by momentous circumstances, was no more than a happy accident would surely be a straining of the idea of coincidence to impossible limits.

Supposing that ingredient had not then been supplied, how long further would God have waited before starting the Legion? If it continued unavailable, would he have started the Legion at all? So it does look as if St Louis Marie de Montfort and his teaching about the Blessed Virgin are primary in the Legion.

It is a further significant circumstance that in his immortal treatise, which was written before 1716 (the date of his death), the Legion seems to be expressly prophesied.

I have stated that the first legionaries came into their first meeting with their minds shaped in regard to Mary. Accordingly it is astonishing that they should find

standing before them on the table a Legion altar (minus the Vexillum) such as now forms the centre-point of every meeting. That was not a pre-arranged adjunct; it was the private notion of the first comer among them. Yet it mirrored the place, which Mary held in their minds and in the scheme which, they were about to launch.

From all these circumstances is it not justifiable reasoning that if we proceed to give things a different slant, we are getting away from God's own idea of the Legion? And where is that going to bring us? I cannot sufficiently stress the importance of this consideration. That right outlook on Mary is our wellspring. The waters of life flow up from it into the Legion and out through the world.

However, this is not to say that the fullness of de Montfort's devotion of slavery, though strongly recommended by the Legion, must be practised. Many people have prejudices on that subject and these have to be taken into account. The acceptance of his representation of her role and of his attitude towards Mary would be sufficient. Note that this attitude works down to one of union, of total giving, of complete dependence. This is and must continue to be the legionary attitude. The Legion Promise expresses it as an obligation.

So beware of any toning down in respect of Our Lady. The smallest sign of that may betray a cast of mind, which is really, whatever external appearances might suggest, poles apart from Legion mentality. Indeed I would wager that if any wrong tendency is given its chance it will initiate a process of divergence which would finish up as the very opposite of the Legion, not merely in doctrine but in every item of its system. This is so drastic a suggestion that I have to try to amplify it for you.

I believe that after sufficient time, and that not too long, that divergence would transfer the Legion from its present spheres of devotion and activity into another well-defined category of action, the characteristics of which may be summed up under the following headings:

1. Mary reduced to nothing. An unquestionable authority has said of one such section that it has driven the thought of Mary not only out of its apostolic system but even out of the private lives of its members.
2. Prayer not given a proper place, excessive stress being laid on activity.
3. Deferred approach to souls, concentration being on a preparatory formation based on lectures.
4. Absorption in the social and economic coupled with a fatal draw towards politics.

You will agree that what I have presented under those four headings is an opposite thing to what the Legion of Mary stands for. It is truly a drastic contention to say that the one could transform itself into the other, but that is the claim I make. I would go further and say that once we break our moorings this transformation would accomplish itself comparatively quickly. Here you must not take me as decrying that other sort of apostolate. It has its place and its value. But I repeat that it is the opposite thing to the Legion of Mary.

Such I would truly believe is what is at stake in that divergence, which begins with the minimising of the Blessed Virgin and which I equally believe would lead to an over-stressing of the temporal in our lives, and eventually end in the promotion of what is called humanism rather than a pure Catholicism.

The Legion programme is something quite different. It stands for the pastoral approach, the simple, the direct going to souls to bring Jesus and Mary to them. The decree on the Lay Apostolate embodies a category which covers this and which incidentally forms a recognition of the fact that the Legion has been the agency which has introduced the lay people to that vital type of action.

If you ask me what is the germ which has produced the Legion and its distinctive point of view, I have not to hesitate. I put it in one word. I say Mary.

Other things, which must be connected with the early days of the Legion are: the Brown Scapular, now regarded by many as too primitive a thing to be bothered with! The Miraculous Medal, a subject for fun! The Enthronement of the Sacred Heart, childish!

Once again I implore: Do not permit a de-simplification of the Legion to be attempted. The Marian sacraments are of particular importance in these days when deliberate attacks are being made on her position.

As to the radical character of that minimising of her, you have evidence before your eyes in many of the new churches. The policy which seems to be deliberately at work is that of either putting her out of the Church altogether or at best of putting her image on the back wall where it will not be before the eyes of the congregation. And then, lest when walking out one might be tempted to say a prayer, she is frequently rendered in repellent forms – in one case like a hideous Indian idol. Such uncouth representations dispel the very thought of prayer. Surely this procedure of withdrawing men from devotion to the great Mother of God would fall under the head of the exceeding great sin spoken of in the First Book of Kings (2:17).

Beware of deviation in the Legion. Over a period even a minor distortion ends destructively. This applies universally, but it would apply particularly to the Legion which is built on certain distinctive ideas. I have claimed that God and Mary presided in a special manner over the origin of the Legion. I believe it to be a true spiritual germ constructed by those loving hands and assigned to a very great mission. The expansion of that germ has been orderly and unerring so far, such that after nearly fifty years we find it precisely endorsed by the council and by the Holy See. It is a sort of miracle that this should have been achieved, because all along the road it has been criticised on the grounds of excess and impropriety. Yet it did not waver in its course. How more than at any stage in the past the doctrine and system of the Legion are being assailed and by an anomaly, just at the time when the Legion has been so emphatically endorsed by the highest quarters.