

Functions

5. The Congress

The first Legion Congress was held by the Clare (Ireland) Curia on Easter Sunday, 1939. Its success led to imitation, as success always does, and now that feature has been firmly grafted into the Legion system.

A Congress should be confined to a Comitium or a Curia. Assemblies on a wider basis would not be in line with the primary conception of a Congress and would not produce the intended fruits. Therefore, the name of Congress should not be applied to those assemblies, if held; nor should they be regarded as substituting for a Congress. But visitors from other areas may be invited to a Congress.

The Concilium has ruled that an area should not hold a Congress more often than every second year. A whole day should be devoted to the function. The availability of a Religious house will solve many of the problems. If possible, the proceedings should begin with Mass, followed by a short address by the Spiritual Director or other priest, and should terminate with Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

The day is divided into sessions, each session having its subject or subjects. Each subject should be very briefly opened up by someone who will have previously prepared his contribution. All should take some part in the discussions. This general participation forms the very life of the Congress.

Again it is emphasised that presiding officers are not to talk much nor to intervene constantly in the discussions. Congresses, like council meetings, are to be run on the parliamentary method, that is, on lines of universal participation regulated from the chair. Some chairpersons show a tendency to comment on the utterance of every speaker. This is the opposite idea to the Congress idea, and it should not be tolerated.

The assistance of some representatives of a higher governing body would be desirable. These could perform some of the special duties, for example, presiding, inaugurating discussions, etc.

Any striving after oratorical effect is to be avoided, for it would create an air of unreality. That is not the Legion climate; in it no one will be inspired, no problem will be solved.

Sometimes all the legionaries are brought to the Congress, sometimes only the officers of praesidia. In the former case it would be allowable at the first session to divide the legionaries according to their different offices, the ordinary members being in one body. Then the special duties and needs of each would be considered. Or alternatively, the legionaries could be divided according to the

works on which they are engaged. But such dividing up is optional, and in any case the subsequent sessions should not be subdivided. It would be inconsistent to bring the members together and then keep them separated for most of the time. It is to be noted that the duty of officers has a wider scope than the routine functions belonging to each office. A Secretary, for instance, whose official horizon was bounded by his minute book would indeed be a defective officer. As all the officers are members of the Curia, their session must investigate methods of perfecting the working of the Curia, both in regard to its actual meetings and its general administration.

A Congress must not amount merely to a Curia meeting, occupying itself with the same administrative details and queries that would fall to be dealt with at the Curia. It should apply itself to the fundamentals. But of course all the lessons learned at the Congress should be put into force by the Curia.

The subjects to be dealt with should concern the main principles of the Legion, broadly: -

- (a) The devotional system of the Legion. The Legion is not understood unless its many-sided devotional aspect is to some reasonable extent grasped by the members; and the Legion is not being properly worked unless that devotion be linked to the active work so intimately as to be its motive and its spirit; in other words, the devotion must animate the whole work as the soul animates the body.
- (b) The legionary qualities, and how they are to be developed.
- (c) The methodical system of the Legion, including the conducting of the meetings and the vital matter of the members' reports, that is, the manner of giving them and of commenting on them.
- (d) The Legion works, including the improvement of methods and the planning of those new works which will enable the Legion to reach out to every person.

An item of the Congress should be a special Talk, by some Spiritual Director or legionary qualified to give it, on some aspect of legionary devotion, idealism, or duty.

Each session should begin and close with prayer. The Legion prayers will provide for three of those occasions.

Careful timekeeping and stewarding is imperative. Failure in this department will ruin the day.

There must be diversification as between successive Congresses in the same area. Only a limited number of topics can be covered at a single Congress, whereas it is necessary that over a period of years much new ground be ploughed up. Secondly, there must never be a sense of standing still. Therefore change for the very sake of change must be sought. Thirdly, the success of a particular Congress naturally suggests that the same programme be adhered to on the next occasion. But part of that success was certainly due to the element of novelty, and this is spent by the first production. If novelty is to figure as a stimulating ingredient in each new Congress, the event must be preceded by ingenious planning.

“If we wish to know in what manner the faithful soul is to be prepared for the coming of the divine Paraclete, let us go in thought to the Cenacle where the disciples have come together. There, according to the order of the Master, they are persevering in prayer as they await the Power from on high that is to come on them and clothe them as with armour for the warfare which lies before them. In that sacred abode of recollection and peace our reverential eye rests on Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit, the Church of the living God. From her by the action of the same Holy Spirit will issue, as from the womb of a mother, the Church Militant, which this new Eve represents and still contains within her.” (Gueranger: The Liturgical Year)

(From the Legion of Mary *Handbook*, pages 177-179)