

## *Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Things*

# **The Handbook**

By Father Francis J. Peffley

Just as there was no New Testament before there was a Catholic Church, so there was no handbook before there was a Legion of Mary. The Legion, as it grew out of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, was a few years in existence before the need arose for written documentation. In the mid nineteen-twenties the Legion had not yet spread to other countries. It was during extension to Scotland that a bishop asked for written information on the Legion. Frank Duff produced the first handbook – a small pamphlet, which became a booklet, then a book, and now a book of accumulated worldwide knowledge and experience grown to over 370 pages. It has become a spiritual classic and, next to the Bible, is the most studied book in the world. Just like the Bible, there are millions of copies in print, in many languages, and it is read privately and at weekly and monthly meetings by over three million members across the world.

The handbook could be said to be a Catholic classic in five ways: an *Organizational Textbook*, a *Catechism*, an *Evangelization Manual*, a book of *Apologetics* and a *Book of Spirituality*. It provides a complete course in how to become a “normal” Catholic, a fully-formed, spiritually oriented, apostolic Catholic in the service of the true Church. It has been noted that out of all the books available to Catholics in pursuit of Christian perfection, just three would be enough: the Holy Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Legion of Mary Handbook. When you combine these three books you have the fullness of the Faith.

## **Organizational Textbook**

Every organization has its rules and requirements, and members are expected to know and abide by them. The Legion of Mary has its own regulations and expectations for its members which the Legion exhorts them to follow. Rules form the members and, just as in Religious Orders, give them an identity. In the case of the Legion, that identity is the Blessed Mother, so the more the legionaries know and respect the rules, the more Our Lady is seen through them in the world. The handbook points out the situation of someone aspiring to be a lawyer or doctor, or of someone in a company seeking advancement: wouldn't they read all they could about the field they were interested in, as soon as possible, and re-read through the year to keep fresh on the ideals and goals presented to them? The handbook says they would have it all memorized in no time if all they had to know were in one book! It has been shown that to read the handbook through from cover to cover takes a period of 16 hours. How much, it's wondered, could legionaries who give time and effort to Our Blessed Mother

week after week, show her forth to others without an intimate knowledge of how she has chosen to appear through them?

## **A Catechism**

Father Aedan McGrath once said that if every Catholic book in the world were destroyed, and only the Legion handbook survived, the Catholic Faith could be reconstructed from its contents! The handbook touches on the basics of the faith – the Blessed Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, the Blessed Mother, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Seven Sacraments; there are extracts from the documents of Vatican II, Papal letters and Canon Law. So the handbook has catechetical value and the Legion recommends that the members study it thoroughly.

## **An Evangelization Manual**

It is also an evangelization manual. It teaches how to share the Faith and spread it to others. It not only offers methods and techniques, but outlines the principles on which Catholic evangelization is based – principles like Mary’s Motherhood of Souls, the need she has to use us to reach them, and the Mystical Body of Christ – how we are to visit and see Christ in everyone contacted. It calls the legionary laity to their commission to “go and preach the Gospel to every creature”.

## **Apologetics**

It supplies the answers to questions by those met in the apostolate who deny, deride or doubt the teachings of the Church; it assists legionaries in explaining what they believe, and why, about the Catholic Church, and gives practical and scriptural support in defending it. A good example is the section on *The Eucharist as an Instrument to Conversion*.

## **A Book of Spirituality**

The handbook is a wonderful book of spirituality. There are references to the saints and their writings, and a couple hundred scripture quotes. Prayer, the devotional life of the Church, the True Devotion to Mary of St. Louis de Montfort, and the Legion’s own spiritual way of life illumine its pages. A legionary of long-term membership was once asked what she thought of the handbook; she replied that she kept it with her prayer book and her rosary. Some members will read it during a holy hour and some have the custom of reading a page a day. There is a saying that if the Faith is not shared, it is weakened and lost. Please God the same will not be said for the spirit of the Legion were the reading and study of the handbook to be neglected by the legionaries.