

*Inside the Legion of Mary – Our Lady of the Legion*

## **Mary and the Holy Spirit**

By Father Francis J. Peffley

I wonder how many legionaries know that their founder, Servant of God Frank Duff, will probably be known as one of the two greatest Marian apostles of the twentieth century – the other being St. Maximilian Kolbe. Their writings and conferences on Our Lady are numerous, and both authors feature the proper and exalted place which Mary holds in the plan of redemption and salvation. As far as we know, these two never met, and yet their Marian teachings are almost identical. I believe one reason for this is that they were influenced by similar authors, especially by the works of St. Louis Marie de Montfort. Though their emphases of Our Lady's role may vary, their basic doctrines do not differ on any major point. For example, most of Fr. Kolbe's writings on the Blessed Virgin deal primarily with her Immaculate Conception, while those of Frank Duff emphasize Mary's role in Redemption, her Mediation of Graces and her Spiritual Motherhood. But both authors hold that there cannot be a proper knowledge of Our Lady *without an appreciation of her unique relationship to the Holy Spirit*. For example, St. Maximilian said that Mary, the Immaculata, as he called her, is someone so sublime, so close to the Most Holy Trinity, that one of the Church Fathers did not hesitate to call her the Complement of the Most Holy Trinity, while Frank Duff has stated that Mary was exalted by God to the very "borders of Divinity." They both attempt to define and explain Mary's intimate union with the Third Divine Person and show a remarkable similarity in their theological thought. I am convinced that those who work and live for Mary will benefit from an introduction to the thought and devotion of these two servants of Mary, and I would like to share their vision of her with her legionaries.

### **The Predestined Woman**

The Church teaches that from all eternity God foresaw the Fall of Adam and Eve and had in his mind a plan to redeem man. God willed that the Second Divine Person of the Trinity would take flesh, and he knew of a woman he would create to be the mother of his Son. This woman would be named Mary, and she would have a vital role in the redemption of mankind. Both Frank Duff and Maximilian Kolbe build their Marian teachings on this point. Frank Duff writes: "From the Beginning and before the World she was in the mind of God. God himself it was who first began to tell of her and to sketch out for her a destiny unquestionably unique. For all that greatness of hers had a beginning very far back. It began before the constitution of the world. From the first, the idea of Mary was present to the Eternal Father along with that of the Redeemer, of whose destiny she formed part."

Fr. Kolbe said the same thing when in 1940 he wrote: "Among the innumerable possible beings who could express his different perfections, God from all eternity saw one endowed with perfect form, immaculate, with no slightest taint of sin – a creature who would reflect his own divine qualities in the most perfect degree possible for a created nature. He rejoiced in this vision, and from all eternity decided that in due time he would call such a creature into existence."

Mary, then, would be associated with the intimacies of the Divine Plan of Grace and Redemption, while at the same time being an immaculate creature never deviating from God's Will or offending him through sin. Both authors hold that Mary was the woman referred to in Genesis where it was written, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he shall strike your head while you strike at his heel." (Gen. 3,15) Frank Duff referred to this statement as "the first prophecy of Redemption," where "the future Redemption is summarized by God himself." About this same scripture quote Maximilian Kolbe wrote: "It was then, after the Fall, that God in his mercy promised humanity a redeemer, while he predicted to the devil that his conquest of Eve, the mother of the future woman who had been foretold, would not change his divine plan. Her offspring would still "strike his head," even though Satan would lie in wait for his heel without respite.

### **From Immaculate Conception To Divine Maternity**

Mary, eternally in the mind of God and destined to become the mother of the Second Divine Person, nevertheless retained her free will to such an extent that the Redemption of mankind depended upon her consent. This is one aspect of Our Lady's role emphasized more by Frank Duff than by Fr. Kolbe. According to Frank Duff, Mary belongs to the inner core of salvation, since she initiated the whole process of restoration through her cooperation and free acceptance of the Angel's message. "The fact is the startling one that it was the pleasure of the Holy Trinity to make Redemption depend on the will of a creature, the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was to will Redemption; otherwise it would not be wrought." For many outside the Church this is a hard saying, but Frank Duff held that it must be understood in order to realize the role which Mary played in Redemption. "The Incarnation would be entrusted to her decision and then to her charge. If she refused, the Redemption would not take place. This is a thought staggering to confront."

Because Mary consented to the will of God, she became the Mother of God. The title "Mother of God" is the greatest of all her titles; and it is from her Divine Maternity that "all the graces bestowed upon the most Holy Virgin Mary" flow, as Fr. Kolbe states. The all pure God truly became man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. It would be against right reason to hold that God, who is purity Itself, could take flesh from a creature who was stained or even touched by sin. Furthermore, since God could create his mother to be any way he wanted, why would he not make her the holiest and most pure creature imaginable, a

“masterpiece of his hands”? Fr. Kolbe believed that “Mary was immaculate because she was to become the Mother of God.” The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady would be the necessary prelude to her Divine Maternity. The Church teaches that from the first moment of her conception Mary was preserved from the slightest taint of original sin. Fr. Kolbe builds most of his study of Mary on this defined dogma of the Faith and from that he expounds his most important study: *Mary’s relationship with the Holy Spirit*.

According to him, the Immaculate Conception is not only the privilege in which Mary is preserved from original sin, but is actually the act in which the Holy Spirit unites himself to Mary. “The Holy Spirit dwells in the Immaculata, lives in her, and does so from the first instant of her existence, and thenceforth forever.”

Frank Duff had this to say about the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady: “She was the first absolutely sinless creature who had ever lived. She was the being of all beings most dear to God. She was the Immaculate Conception. All that he could give to her, he gave. All that she could receive, she received. She was perfectly united to him; she was, as the Angel’s message said, “Filled with the Holy Spirit.” In many of his writings Fr. Kolbe examines Mary’s name as the “Immaculate Conception.” At Lourdes, Mary replied to St. Bernadette who asked her who she was by saying: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Fr. Kolbe teaches that not only does this title tell us that Mary was immaculate in her conception, but that she actually *is* the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculata in her apparitions at Lourdes did not say: ‘I am the woman who was immaculately conceived’ but ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’ With these words she set down not only the fact of the Immaculate Conception but also the manner in which this privilege is hers. She is Immaculate Conception itself; therefore it is not some kind of quality she has, but something that pertains to her nature.

The Immaculate Conception, then, belongs to her very essence: she is “Immaculateness” itself, without being eternal or the cause of her own existence. Mary was created by God in time, and yet she can say in truth that she is the Immaculate Conception. Fr. Kolbe makes the distinction between Mary, who is the human Immaculate Conception, and the Holy Spirit, whom he calls “the eternal and uncreated Immaculate Conception:” This eternal Immaculate Conception, the Holy Spirit, immaculately conceives the divine life in the womb, or depths, of Mary’s soul, making her the human Immaculate Conception. Even the virginal womb of Mary’s body is reserved to him, that in it he might conceive in time – just as all material things come to being in time – the divine life of the God-man.

## **Fullness of Grace**

As legionaries well know, there is nothing in the realm of grace lacking in the Blessed Virgin; every grace she could have received, she has received. The Church teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in the souls of those who are in the

state of grace. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the souls of the just, how much more intimately must he dwell in Our Lady, who is the most perfect and holiest of God's creatures. Fr. Kolbe says that "he must dwell in the most perfect manner possible in the soul of the Immaculata." That "most perfect manner" is no less than a union of the Holy Spirit and Mary.

### **Union With The Holy Spirit**

Fr. Kolbe explains that their union is above all an interior one, "a union of her essence with the 'essence' of the Holy Spirit." Frank Duff writes, "What the Holy Spirit has been pleased to do has been to establish between himself and Mary a union so profound as to stop only at identity." This union, however, does not remove Mary from the human condition, so it is not a co-mingling of natures.

At the moment of the Incarnation the Blessed Virgin was associated to the generation of the Eternal Son and thereby was brought into a permanent state of union with the Third Divine Person which was the most intense that could be established without removing her from the human condition. It involved participation by the one in the action of the other. They would work together in a sort of identity.

Regarding this, Frank Duff says that in the Incarnation, there was "a participation by the one in the action of the other," that the word "action" is not mere instrumentality but a sort of inter-participation. Thus in the Incarnation, and also in the distribution of grace, Mary is not merely an instrument of the Holy Spirit but a real conscious co-operator. Frank Duff holds that it is by Mary's association with the Son's Incarnation that she is united to the Holy Spirit. Mary and the Holy Spirit together bring forth Christ and she remains united to him from that time onward. For this reason, Frank Duff refers to Marian titles such as "sanctuary" or "temple of the Holy Spirit" as inadequate expressions of their union. He holds that the Holy Spirit has "so united her to himself as to make her the next thing in dignity to himself."

Both Frank Duff and Fr. Kolbe explicitly state, however, that even though there is an intense union between the Holy Spirit and Mary, Mary is not the Incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Frank Duff says, "through Mary the Third Person of the Holy Trinity makes a presentation of himself to us analogous to that which the Second Divine Person offers through Jesus Christ." This comparison is only an analogous one he says, because "Jesus is the Second Divine Person, whereas Mary is not the Holy Spirit." And so it is clear that the Sacred Humanity of Jesus possesses a higher union with the Second Divine Person than Mary does with the Third Divine Person. Regarding this point, Frank Duff wrote: "From the moment when the Second Divine Person became incarnate, he was one with Jesus and does not now exist otherwise. Jesus is the Second Divine Person. Therefore he must render in a human way the very appearance of God the Son whom we will see in heaven." He continued: "In the case of Jesus there will be

no question of distinguishing him in heaven from the Second Divine Person since that is who he is, but only of seeing the divine essence. But the Holy Spirit and Mary, however like they may be to each other, are two different persons, the one divine the other human. Both men agree totally on this point. In fact, many of their statements are almost identical.

### **Image of The Spirit**

One aspect of Our Lady's relationship to the Holy Spirit found in the work of Frank Duff is that Mary is the most perfect image of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "It is the teaching of the Church that she has been brought to the very borders of the infinite. From this we can go on to say that she furnishes the most complete human expression of him." The Blessed Virgin reflects the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent humanly possible. She was made "like to the Holy Spirit" as far as a creature could be, without becoming Divine. She affords in a human way a comprehensive portrait of him, but one which lives and which takes in the inner virtue as well as the outer appearance. Her Immaculate Conception was Mary's spiritual birth into likeness with the Third Divine Person. The Holy Spirit would form Mary into his own image and likeness. Like any progenitor he could imprint his appearance on her, and this would be accentuated by her subsequent growth in grace "which was to make her a worthy mother of Jesus and a fit cooperater of the Holy Spirit himself." He reveals himself through her to such a degree that in her we almost see him. "If that Holy Spirit proposes to make a human showing of himself to us, he would have to choose not mere pictorial or artistic symbols but a person. And that person would need to be at the very height of the human scale. There would have to be a reasonable suitability or compatibility between himself and that medium whom he would thus choose to mirror him. As the Second Divine Person did not disdain to use the humanity of Jesus Christ and the womb of Mary for his intervention in human affairs, so there would be no incongruity in the Holy Spirit making a somewhat similar use of an exalted human being like the Blessed Virgin."

Although in the writings of these two men they refer often to Mary as "Spouse of the Holy Spirit", they both believe that it is an inadequate expression. Fr. Kolbe feels it is too weak a title for so intimate a union: "The third Person of the Blessed Trinity never took flesh; still, our human word 'spouse' is far too weak to express the reality of the relationship between the Immaculata and the Holy Spirit. We can affirm that she is, in a certain sense, the 'incarnation' of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that we love in her; and through her we love the Son." Frank Duff agrees that their relationship is "somewhat incorrectly called that of spouses" since it is deeper than that. Mary is united to the Holy Spirit and becomes the channel for his graces. Together Mary and the Holy Spirit bring forth the Eternal Son and form men into the image and likeness of Christ. Fr. Kolbe, in trying to explain why the term "spouse" is not sufficient says that the Holy Spirit penetrated her being to such depths that to call her his spouse "is to use a pale,

distant, most inadequate – even though correct – comparison to express their union which defies all human expression.”

## **Devotion To Mary and The Holy Spirit**

These dual writings bring us ultimately to devotion to Mary and to the Holy Spirit. Frank Duff says that where Our Lady is, the Holy Spirit is, and that Mary is in the Holy Spirit with such intensity that they are virtually one and possess identity of action, “so that devotion to one comprises devotion to the other.” Therefore in going to Mary one necessarily goes to the Holy Spirit, and in going to the Holy Spirit one necessarily includes Mary. And Fr. Kolbe himself said: “When we honor the Immaculata we are, very specifically, adoring the Holy Spirit.” According to Frank Duff, Mary helps us to know the Holy Spirit. She makes him real to us: “If Mary did no more than reflect in her own person the splendor of her spouse it would be much. But that extraordinary Mirror of Justice does more; she projects an image of his perfection and action. She makes him tangible to minds and in a sense visible to the world. He presents himself to our consciousness as a real person and claims our homage.”

Mary not only reflects the Holy Spirit but gives us an image of his perfection and action, much more so than does the Dove or the Tongues of Fire. Without Mary it would be very hard to have a proper image of the Holy Spirit to pray to. For this reason Mary increases our knowledge of and devotion to the Third Divine Person.

Frank Duff continues his point by saying that the images which we presently have for the Holy Spirit are not fully adequate: “While such images as the dove or the tongues of fire are presented to us as symbols of the Holy Spirit, it could not be said that they resemble him. On the other hand the Holy Spirit in establishing such an inexpressible union with Mary is necessarily making a real revelation of himself through her.” Mary is seen as mirroring for us the Third Person of the Trinity in somewhat the same way that Jesus mirrors the Second Person, but the difference is this: Jesus is the Second Divine Person, whereas Mary is not the Holy Spirit. She displays to us a likeness to the Holy Spirit which is analogous to the likeness of Jesus Christ to the Second Divine Person.

So we have the firm affirmation by two of the Church’s greatest Marian scholars that a true devotion to the Holy Spirit and Mary is the very definition of sanctity, of true holiness. So, to some extent, the Holy Spirit “makes a human showing” in every one of the saints, and both authors believe that Mary is the “greatest of the saints.” This should bring a deep consolation and joy to legionaries of Mary – whose very purpose of membership is personal holiness – and who, having given themselves to the Holy Spirit by their Legion Promise and their practice of the True Devotion to Mary, can actually be for others “human showings” of the Holy Spirit!