

# Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

(Tenth in a Series)

## MARY'S GIFT TO CHINA

By Richard Core

A cursory reading of the history of the outstanding religious communities in the Catholic Church will reveal the fulfilment of Christ's promise that He would never abandon His followers. God always raises up great organizations or persons at certain periods in world history, to answer a social need, or to help to combat some specific and widespread disease afflicting mankind.

The first fateful fifty years of our century would seem to indicate that materialism, principally, is the contemporary social malady upsetting the order of things necessary for world peace.

One leading Catholic historian has expressed the opinion that in Christian times the people of one century, generally speaking, are no better or worse than any other in the matter of morals. However, certain heresies and atheistic philosophies seem to be more prominent at some stages in world history than at others.

In our day, listed high among other curative measures which may well be Our Blessed Lord's healing prescription to counteract materialism and secularism is the Legion of Mary founded by Mr. Frank Duff in Ireland on September 7, 1921.

Archbishop Anthony Riberi, China's Apostolic Internuncio, once observed that the Legion of Mary is "one of the greatest things for the Church in China."

Its success has been long and glorious. The enthusiasm the Legion has acclaimed has been universal. It is a beautiful picture etched into Catholic current events.

The reawakening of the laity to the consciousness of their duty in participating in the Church's apostolate is consoling to the present Holy Father and the Hierarchy of the universal Church. Too often in Church history, people are apt to forget that the work of Catholics is a partial and obligatory realization of corollaries directly attendant upon the sacred dogmas of Catholicism.

### Standard Bearer



Striving to bring others to a knowledge of God is a duty placed on all Catholics of prudent disposition. It springs from the essential nature of God's plan of salvation for all mankind.

Traditional Catholic practice demands that all Catholics have an obligation to share in the Church's apostolic mission, at least by prayer and good example. Others competently equipped may offer good advice, suggest the study of Catholic doctrine under a priest.

The Legion of Mary attempts to ameliorate the current weakened state of world Christianity, by working in close harmony with the Church's official members, her bishops and priests. The rampant materialism and secularism of our age serves to strengthen the Church's enemies; their strength is in direct proportion to the weakness of Catholics.

It offers specific remedies to aid in awakening moribund Catholics and non-Catholics alike to the dangers to religion; it points out the need for men and women today of alert and vitalized faith who can meet the challenge of the Church's enemies and the Gates of Hell.

Theirs is the task, wherever they regularly visit, to revivify and enkindle the faith of all Catholics.

There is a natural temptation perhaps to laud at length the impressive work of the Legion. In a little over one year's time; it has spread like wild-fire the length and breadth of the Orient. The magnificent reception it has received here has surpassed all expectations.

It is impossible, however, to set down in limited space a graphic elaboration of the hundreds of splendid works of the many praesidia in the Colony.

Father Aedan McGrath, a forty-four-year-old Columban Father who came to China in 1930, was authorized in 1947 by the Apostolic Internuncio, to establish the Legion of Mary throughout China as part of the Lay Apostolate Department under the Catholic Central Bureau, inaugurated by the Bishops of the country.

He came to the Colony in December, 1948, and with the encouragement of His Lordship, Bishop Valtorta, began to promote interest in the Legion in local parishes and schools.

Catholics were invited to attend diocesan chapters. By April 1949, the central governing body was created to co-ordinate the functions of senior and junior groups.

Largely under the supervision of Convent sisters, the junior legionnaires are boys and girls under eighteen years of age. Among other assignments, they induce Catholics to support the Catholic press, attend the Sacraments, teach catechism and encourage their friends to take active participation in Church functions.

The comprehensive scope of the work of senior members is exclusively spiritual. Their activities are under the efficient leadership of spiritual directors and parish priests in the Colony. They are parishioners who visit homes, hospitals and prisons, trying to interest non-Catholics to investigate the truths of the Catholic Church.

Archbishop Riberi's observation that the Legion of Mary is one of the greatest things for the Church in China, applies here in Hong Kong as well.

The Legion has energized the Catholic population like a breath of spring, and the non-Catholic population too has not failed to feel its marvellous effects.

Sometime ago, a pagan woman wasting away with grief over abandonment by her soldier husband, was given a Sacred Heart badge and frequently consoled by visiting legionnaires.

"I was the most miserable person in the world until they came," she related shortly before she died, "but those people who visited me made me realize that the world is not so bad after all!"

Each praesidium has innumerable records of marriages revalidated by priests as a result of Legion efforts urging people to have their marriages rectified and blessed by the Church.

Refugee families are seen, contacts are made in families to enquire into the spiritual status of children who are often found unbaptized or unconfirmed, owing to parental neglect.

### A Legion Praesidium Meets . . .



No small contribution to the life of the Church by each diocesan chapter is the attempts of legionnaires to urge the recitation of the family Rosary and to supply beads and holy pictures where they are lacking in the home.

Striking example is often provided by many legionnaires who take youngsters to church where parents are obliged to work on Sundays or are otherwise indisposed.

From the ranks of the Legion in the Colony have come several vocations to the religious life and it is also reported that other girls are contemplating embracing the sisterhood.

In the words of Archbishop Riberi let it be said in closing:

**"The Legion is our Blessed Mother's greatest gift to China and the world in our day."**

You are God's chosen people, holy and well beloved, the livery you wear must be tender compassion, humility, gentleness and patience. You must bear with one another's faults, be generous to one another, where someone has given grounds for complaint; the Lord's generosity to you must be the model of yours. And to crown all this, Charity; that is the bond which makes us perfect.

(Colossians 12-14)

### ANNUAL RE-UNION OF LEGION OF MARY

On Sunday last, April 16 a splendid gathering of over three hundred Legionaries of Mary, representing some thirty two Senior and Junior Praesidia of Hong Kong was held in the Catholic Club. This general annual re-union of the Legion is so that members of various Praesidia should meet and come to know one another in an atmosphere of mutual friendliness.

Benediction in the Chapel, the Rosary and opening prayers of the Legion were the first events of the afternoon, after which the guests moved over to the Club where the afternoon was spent in informal conversation, interspersed with musical items rendered by members of different Praesidia. The meeting was honored by the presence of His Lordship, Bishop Valtorta, who also spoke during the afternoon, and the Spiritual Directors of a number of Praesidia. Rev. Father Gallagher, S.J. in his Allocutio spoke of the spirit of unity and loyalty that must be in the Legion and of the apostolic spirit that must characterize its members. Reverend Father Speziali, Spiritual Director of the Curia led the Legion prayers during the afternoon, and the meeting was brought to a close with the singing of the Legion Anthem. This observer was struck by the evidence that the afternoon provided of the achievement of the Legion in bringing together in a very real unity representatives of so many and varied walks of Hong Kong life.