

Apostles for Asia's Tomorrow

By Father Aidan McGrath

I must give you the reason why I am in the Philippines at all. I arrived here in 1980 at the request of the founder of the Legion of Mary, Mr. Frank Duff. Prior to that I had visited bishops all over the Far East and Indonesia, Malaysia and such places on behalf of the Legion of Mary. After two years I went back and reported to Frank, who then wanted me to work in the Philippines.

"Why would you need me in the Philippines?" I asked. "They're all Catholics!" Ignoring my objection, he said: "Father, if Asia is ever to become Christian it must be through the Filipino lay people."

At the time there had been no great migration from the Philippines, but within three or four years it started, and has gained momentum ever since, so that now there must be over 10 million Filipinos around the world.

This was probably what I call Mr. Duff's last will and testament. "Go and speak to those people," he said. "They are willing to spread the Gospel."

Seeing this migration, the bishops have exhorted Filipinos to remember that when they go abroad to find work they take with them in their hearts something far more precious than any job, namely their faith.

Please share it!, the bishops plead. Now to me it is like a repetition of the Irish who went abroad a century ago, and God used them in His own way. Now we have a similar thing happening. Wherever they go, Filipinos set up the Legion. It is their means of propagating the faith, evangelizing by their example and enthusiasm. They obviously treasure the faith they have received, and are committed to sharing it and handing it on for the future.

As Frank Duff understood and wrote, in the apostolic field the requisites for spreading the faith must not be pitched too high, or we would then be thrown back on a "missionary class," meaning a few, so that the evangelization of the world would not be attempted at all. We must not remove apostleship from the capacity of the common people. If every Catholic is bound to be apostolic, and the council insists on the fact, then the system of organizing the laity must not contradict that requirement.

As against that, by utilizing ordinary lay material along lines of simplicity and relying on faith and effort, the Legion of Mary is able to accomplish its apostolic task.

There are at least 100,000 Filipinos in Taiwan. I go there regularly because it was part of my beat when I came to the Far East here, and I speak Chinese. My brother, Fr. Ivar, was there for 44 years and his parish is now the migrant center. There you see a packed church and hear beautiful singing. There's such joyful celebration that at first

others may think it's a football game, and then they see it's only people who want to fulfill their weekly obligation!

Fifteen years ago while Fr. Ivar was still in the parish, I started the Legion of Mary for him, and it has been extremely successful ever since among the Filipinos.

One bishop in Taiwan, who has since been made a Cardinal, invited me to meet all the bishops at a conference where I explained how Filipinos were mainly doing a good job and going to Mass when they could, but there was a problem. They could not leave the factories to go to Mass. I asked the bishops to allow us to set up the Legion within the factories, so that they could hold their meetings and do their work.

The bishops were delighted and gave their Permission. In Ninkan a very splendid praesidium was conducted by one of our Columbans, and there they took on themselves the challenge of extending it into factories. They are working inside now and we hope this work will expand.

In Hong Kong there are some 150,000 Filipinos. They have taken over St. Joseph's Church that used to be very exclusive with plenty of room. Now, however, it is completely packed with Filipinos, from morning to night.

Again, this is an extraordinary example of how important their faith is to them. Fr. Columbo, the parish priest, thought so much of them that he built three beautiful air-conditioned rooms in which they can now hold all their Legion of Mary meetings on Sundays. I have attended these meetings and they are admirable.

Once again the amount of work they have done, and are doing, is incalculable. May the Holy Spirit go with them, so that the spirit of faith they take with them may bear fruit.