

## The MI within the Church

The evening of October 16, 1917, Friar Maximilian presented to his companions the program for a new Marian association, the Militia of the Immaculata, which he had handwritten on a small piece of paper. With not much consideration for the form, in a few essential points he had drafted the *aim, conditions* and *means* for achieving a universal-scale project.

Shortly after, Fr. Kolbe submitted the MI program to the approval of the Church. As early as January 1922, the Militia of the Immaculata received approval as a pious union, that is, an association of the faithful aiming to promote works of charity and apostolate, according to the Code of Canon Law in force from 1917 to 1983.

At the beginning of his apostolic work in Poland, Maximilian drafted a statute for the priests of the Franciscan Order (cf. *KW* 1370); he also revised bylaws for the MI men's circle that a group of lay men had composed in close collaboration with him (*KW* 1371). Later, Fr. Kolbe offered his own observations for the MI general statutes that a group of friars were composing in Rome. Overall, Fr. Maximilian appears to have been more concerned about the "spirit" of the statutes than of the "letter," making sure that the norms conveyed an authentic spirit of total dedication to the Immaculata for the coming of the Kingdom of God in all hearts, a spirit "without boundaries" that can hardly be enclosed within the limits of legal norms.

Following the 1983 promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law by Pope St. John Paul II on October 16, 1997, the MI received pontifical approval as an *international and universal public association of the faithful*. The MI is therefore a *public association* because it enjoys legal status thanks to the Church's approval; it's *universal*, because, having been approved by the Holy See, the MI operates in the name of the universal Church and is open to all Catholics (lay persons, clerics and members of institutes of consecrated life); it's *international* because the MI can freely spread all over the world. In other words, the MI received from the Church the highest recognition, which reflects St. Maximilian's original and universal inspiration.

The MI is and will always be a broader reality than what even the better-drafted statutes would be able to articulate. In St. Maximilian's own words, the Militia of the Immaculata is "is a global vision of Catholic life in a new form, consisting in the bond with the Immaculata, our universal Mediatrix before Jesus" (*KW* 1220), and it's called to be an extension of Mary's maternal presence and universal mission. "Strictly speaking, the aim of the Militia of the Immaculata is the goal of the Immaculata herself (*ibid.*), whose single desire "is to raise the level of our spiritual life to the summits of holiness" (*ibid.*) In 1935, Fr. Maximilian wrote also that the MI "should not present itself as one more organization among the many that already exist, but rather deeply permeate all organizations" (*KW* 658), so as to make Mary's presence visible and effective everywhere.

After 100 years of life and mission, the MI continues to be a gift for the Church and for each person thirsting for God's love and Mary's tenderness.

ADP