

# Interview of Fr. Couture Asia District Superior



The USA District sincerely thanks Fr. Daniel Couture for granting this interview about the SSPX's work in its Asia District.

Fr. Daniel Couture during the banquet for his Priestly Silver Jubilee in 2009



A new priest for India:  
Fr. Therasian Xavier

**Father, thank you for agreeing to give this interview. You are here in Winona for the ordinations to the priesthood. This morning [June 17] five priests were ordained, one of whom is an Indian, who will go to India. What are your thoughts during these ordinations?**

**Fr. Couture:** It is always a great joy to see the priesthood perpetuated, to see that the Society of St. Pius X is truly serving the Church by ordaining these young priests, who come from every corner of the world. Here, we can see that grace continues to take root in the souls of young people, who wish to work for the Church, for the reign of our Lord. I came here to the United States to assist at the ordination of one of our Indians, who is in fact the son of our translator in Palayamkottai, in southern India. His father is the one who translates our sermons and catechism lessons every Sunday. It is a great joy for us and for the entire District of Asia.

**You are District Superior of Asia, now in the middle of your third term. Asia is an immense district, containing many different countries and peoples. An enormous amount of work has already been done. Can you summarize the work in your district?**

**Fr. Couture:** Asia represents half of the world's population. Starting from the west, it extends from the Middle East, where we have opened or taken charge of a few



Mass centers this year in the United Arab Emirates and in Oman, where we have some French, Indian, Sri-Lankan, and Filipino traditional Catholic families, and encompasses everything as far east as Japan, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands as well. It is immense. It is the adventure of the missionary, just as we read in the lives of the great missionaries such as St. Theophane Venard, the martyrs from the Seminary for the Foreign Missions in Paris, etc.

It fills us with enthusiasm and it is very encouraging to see, as Archbishop Lefebvre would say, the Holy Ghost everywhere. In whatever country we may be, we find precious pearls that the Good God chooses for Himself.

And for us missionaries, this is missionary work that is not quite the same as in the past, when missionaries settled somewhere and built villages, schools, etc. We work a little more superficially, but we save what can be saved. But it is encouraging to

find everywhere pure and generous souls that thirst for the truth. That encourages us; it is like the fuel that keeps us going in the missions.



The chapel in the St. Pius X Priory, the Asia District headquarters

**You operate out of the District Headquarters in Singapore. How many priories and permanently-established religious houses do you have? From these priories, how many chapels and Mass centers do you visit regularly?**

**Fr. Couture:** For the 18 countries that we cover in Asia, we have six priories. I say six, because we are now in the process of opening the sixth one; in the coming weeks, we will be purchasing a property in the southern Philippines. We have one priory in southern India, one in Singapore, three in the Philippines, and one in New Zealand. They house 22 priests, including the young priest who was just ordained. As for the chapels, I do not know their exact number, but it's close to 40 or 50. In India itself, we have at least twenty or so. In some areas of the Philippines, there is one chapel per region. As Fr. Schmidberger always said, the Society plays its role by its presence. It exercises its apostolate "*by its presence*", by being a point of reference. There are confused Catholics in these various countries: Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. They do not know who is going to guide them, they search and search, and finally they come across the Society. There they find the Faith, the truth, the liturgy, and the catechism, all of which satisfies them since they come from God. It is encouraging.

**Just as they do everywhere else, the priests of the Society bring the Faith and the sacraments to those who thirst for them. Of course, like every priest of the Society, you of course keep close to heart the priesthood, since it is the first end of our congregation. Are priests or even bishops today more attentive to or interested in the Society? Has the impact of the *Motu Proprio* led to results that are truly beneficial for Tradition?**

**Fr. Couture:** Here and there, yes, it has. We have more and more contacts with priests. I will give an example: in one



Fr. Couture (center) with the priests stationed at the SSPX's priory in Palayamkottai, India



The Roman Missal:  
"Teach us the Mass!"

country, the bishop sent two of his priests to a week-long *Una Voce* session in England to learn to say the traditional Mass. But, for whatever reason—I think there were probably too many priests, and they did not have enough personal attention—after having gone through that week-long session in England to learn the traditional Mass, they came to see us, to start again from scratch: *"Teach us the Mass. May we do a session just to be able to read the Latin of the missal?"*

So there are priests, and there are also bishops in several countries. I am thinking especially of the Philippines. There, it is not quite the effect of the *Motu Proprio*, although it is certainly related. In the Philippines, we are organizing a pro-life campaign, under the direction of Fr. Onoda, who is leading it. He launched a Rosary Crusade and the bishops were impressed. There are also some bishops who have come to lunch at the priory. So it is very positive.

In another diocese —at the end of May 2010, during the year the Pope dedicated to the priesthood—a bishop allowed one of our priests to give a conference to 45 diocesan priests on the priesthood. This conference will certainly bear fruit, because they really appreciated it. This archbishop clearly sees that the Society has something to offer on the one hand, and on the other, among his priests there is an absence, there is a lack of spiritual life.



The Breviary: the Church's official prayers for sanctifying the hours of the day

This archbishop said to me recently, *"Speak to my priests about the breviary, speak to them about the importance of the breviary, about the importance of the Holy Hour."* There is a terrible lack of prayer. An old priest of the diocese said to me, *"The priests in our diocese do not say the breviary, nor the Rosary, neither do they do meditation. Imagine the priesthood without these foundations of the spiritual life: what is left? What is left? We are not surprised to see a decline in vocations, if there is no spiritual life supporting them!"*

So it is very interesting that this archbishop turns to us: *"Teach my priests how to say the breviary"* or *"Speak to them of the importance of the breviary."* And that is when we have this joy to be part of the Society, and to work for the Church, which was Archbishop Lefebvre's intuition. We are at the Church's service and therefore—here and there, it is starting already and it will certainly grow—we are also at the service of bishops who do not know where to turn to help their priests. They see there is a problem but they do not have the solution, and they see that, after all, the Society has kept something, a treasure which they need.

As for the problem with the traditional Mass, there are several priests who are interested, but since they do not know Latin, and do not have the books containing the rubrics, etc., there is a great weakness there. I know one bishop in Vietnam who said—and I even have it in writing—that *“all priests who wish to say the traditional Mass in my diocese may do so.”* That comes from the bishop, so there is no objection. However, they lack the means necessary to return to the traditional Mass. They also have a certain fear. In Vietnam, I once heard a priest say to me, *“But we do not know Latin, and without Latin, we cannot return to the traditional Mass.”* So the lack of Latin is a hurdle we must jump.

I once taught some priests to say the traditional Mass in Chinese. They were Chinese priests who did not know Latin. We justified this by what Archbishop Lefebvre taught: *“We are not fighting firstly for Latin; we are fighting for the Faith.”* And we have explained to priests that it is better to say the traditional Mass in the vernacular tongue than to say the New Mass in Latin. It is not firstly a question of language; it is a question of Faith. And we have had a few Masses like this with certain priests. So, there is a desire, but there are obstacles to overcome that are serious and difficult. Nevertheless, it is possible with a little good will.

**Father, to return to the subject of China, we have many visitors and readers who are interested in what is happening there. Recently the media has been covering the elections, nominations, and consecrations of Chinese bishops, with, without, or against the Vatican’s authorization. Could you go over the difficulty of the situation in China, including the struggle between the Catholic Church and the Patriotic National Church, and the Vatican’s policy during these last few years?**

**Fr. Couture:** China is very complicated. The French have a saying: *C’est du chinois* (“It’s all Chinese”), which is a colloquialism for something that is difficult to understand. It’s not just the Chinese language, which



The Mass of All Time



The illicitly-ordained Bishop Guo of the schismatic Chinese Patriotic Church

is very elaborate. For us who come from the West, it is difficult to understand them, but its religious situation is also very delicate and difficult. The underground Catholics truly believe that they have been betrayed and abandoned by the authorities of the Church. I have been told of several incidents: priests who come from Europe, visiting a clandestine seminary and spending a few hours there without giving any donations or material support; then the same priests go to the Patriotic seminary, in the hands of the government, and there they spend weeks, giving them money, goods, etc. And in another diocese, if I am not mistaken, a Patriotic priest was nominated, with the approval of the Vatican, head of the clandestine Church, because there was no bishop there. You see how great the confusion is. It is as if a conciliar priest was nominated to become the head of a district of the Society. That, in Europe, would not last long, I think.

As for other difficult situations in China, in certain dioceses you have two bishops: one Patriotic bishop and one clandestine bishop. In two dioceses in particular, there are even three. One Patriotic priest said—and it is well known in these dioceses—*“when the underground bishop dies, the Patriotic bishop will take his place.”* The Patriotic bishop is nominated auxiliary bishop by the Vatican. The Patriotic priests say so themselves. I heard from friends who went there that there are certain Patriotic priests who are starting to say the traditional Mass now. Consider all the subtleties, the degrees of confusion: it is all quite complicated.

There are traditional priests who are official members of the Patriotic Church without having the membership card of the party. They say the traditional Mass whereas the underground priests say the New Mass. I know a young Patriotic priest who says the traditional Mass every Sunday. He was asked: *“Which bishop do you name during the Canon of the Mass?”* He candidly answered: *“I name the legitimate, underground bishop.”* This is a priest in the Patriotic Church! So he does not even name the bishop who ordained him, he names the underground bishop. He even said, to those who were present and could hear him: *“In a few days there will be an ordination for the Patriotic Church, and the young priests will be ordained by the Patriotic bishop. But the same day, they will go to see the clandestine bishop in order to be reordained.”* This is common practice there; it is enough to give you a headache. So we do not know what to make of it any more.



Cardinal Kung (+2000) with Pope John Paul II after being released from a Communist prison. The cardinal was greatly disappointed when he discovered later that the Vatican often ignored situations where dioceses were allowing schismatic Patriotic Chinese clergy to study in their seminaries

There are similar situations just about everywhere in China, a truly terrible confusion. A vicar general said that he no hope left in Rome because they do not know what Rome has in mind. Are they sacrificing the underground Church like they did in the Ukraine ten or twenty years ago? We do not know, but sometimes they get the impression that politics goes before the good God. And that hurts.

I know a priest who was arrested a few years ago. He was condemned to five days in prison. They did not complicate things: five days without sleep, standing, without eating or drinking. He told everything. That kind of torture does not leave any mark. It is very easy. They have very simple techniques.

So, there is all this confusion in addition to the feeling that they have been abandoned. Further, doubt exists about the validity of ordinations done in the Patriotic Church by bishops recognized by the Vatican. There is a clandestine bishop who wrote a study on the episcopal consecrations of the Patriotic bishops. The bishop concluded in favor of the invalidity of these consecrations. It is not enough for Rome to say, "Okay, we absolve you, we approve you", in order to validate an ordination. If the bishop is invalid, all the priests he ordains are invalid as well. And, as I was saying a moment ago, the young priests who are ordained by the Patriotic Church go to get re-ordained by the underground bishops. There is even a bishop who says he has received bishops of the Patriotic Church who wanted to be reconsecrated. There is a doubt as to the validity of the ordinations and consecrations in the Patriot Church. There is massive confusion.

So, how is it that Rome, by making a sign of the Cross (as I would say), approves an ordination or a consecration? That does not solve the problem. That makes it worse, because by doing that, Rome gives its *placet*, its blessing, to situations that put into question the validity of the consecrations. It is not enough to say "yes" for it to be valid; it has to be redone.



Islamic extremists in Indonesia recently disrupted a Catholic Mass on Easter Day

**We can speak of martyrs today in Asia. On the one hand, there are those who are being persecuted, as they are in China by the communist regime which is still in power. On the other hand, we can also speak of martyrs in reference to those who are persecuted by Muslims. Is all this a reality in Asia today?**

**Fr. Couture:** Certainly. We have to be very discreet in our apostolate in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Middle East. We have to be careful.

We are really a small handful of faithful. In India, there are still martyrs. There are religious men and women, even priests, who are burned alive or shot dead in front of their convents, orphanages, or churches, which are also burned and destroyed. This happens almost every month. There was a message that circulated a

few months ago throughout the whole world, a call for help, for prayers from some Catholics in northern India who were being persecuted violently. And there is the famous incident with the elephants in 2009 in the state of Orissa, in India.

**Yes, could you give us your understanding of the events?**

**Fr. Couture:** Well, I do not know all the details, but according to the story, in 2008, angry mobs came into a Catholic village, and killed and persecuted Catholics. I believe they even burned churches and orphanages. The following year, on the same day, a herd of wild elephants came out of the forest, went into one of the villages, and came to attack the houses of those who had terrorized and persecuted the Catholics, but avoided the Catholic homes. It is almost scriptural, like the story of the bears with the prophet in the Bible (4 Kg 2:24). But this time it was in India recently. The archdiocese of Colombo, Sri Lanka, published the story and you can find it on their website.

*[taken from the archdiocese of Colombo website]*

### **ELEPHANTS ATTACK IN ORISSA EXACTLY AFTER ONE YEAR OF PERSECUTIONS**

In July 2008 a severe persecution of Christians broke out in the Indian state of Orissa. A 22 year old nun was burnt to death when angry mobs burnt down an orphanage in Khuntpali village in Barhgarh district, another nun was gang raped in Kandhamal, mobs attacked churches, torched vehicles, houses of Christians destroyed, and Fr. Thomas Chellen, director of the pastoral center that was destroyed with a bomb, had a narrow escape after a Hindu mob nearly set him on fire. The end result saw more than 500 Christians murdered, and thousands of others injured and homeless after their houses were reduced to ashes. Recently a strange and dramatic event took place in Orissa, which has many people talking and wondering.

In recent months, herds of wild elephants have begun to storm villages that are home to some of the worst persecutors of Christians during the troubles. In one village, where in August a year ago the Christians had to run for their lives while their homes were being destroyed by rioters, a herd of elephants emerged from the surrounding jungle exactly one year later, in July 2009, at the same time of the day of the attack.

These elephants first attacked a rock crusher machine owned by a key leader of the persecution movement. They then went on to destroy his house and farms.

Hundreds of villagers have been forced to take shelter in camps in the Indian state of Orissa after repeated attacks by a herd of elephants.

Seven people have been killed and several others injured in attacks by a herd of 12-13 elephants over the past few weeks in Kandhamal district.

Over 2,500 people living in 45 villages have been affected by the attacks, district chief Krishen Kumar said.

It is, however, unclear why this herd of elephants migrated from the Lakheri sanctuary in a neighbouring district. He said the herd had travelled some 300km into Kandhamal, and even entered a town in the district. Wildlife officials were camping at the site of the attacks and trying to find out why the elephants had come out of their sanctuary. The villagers say elephants attack their areas in herds, causing heavy destruction.

Gaining momentum, they rampaged through other non-Christian homes, demolishing gardens and singling out the home of persecutors, leaving Christian homes untouched.

These strange attacks have spread, and according to a report, the elephants have already destroyed more than 700 houses in 30 villages, and killed five people. Nobody in this area has seen or even imagined the unique appearance of a herd of wild elephants such as this. The elephants are not ordinary elephants; they appear to be on a mission.

Typically, smaller elephants enter a village first, appearing to survey the community. They then rejoin the larger herd, and larger elephants soon follow and get the job done.

The ministry partner in India stated "We think that it might have something to do with the avenging the blood of martyrs. In fact the fear of God has fallen on the local people, who have labeled these elephants "Christian elephants."

With little help coming from the administration, the villagers have taken to road blockades. "The elephants have destroyed crops and selected houses. But officials too express helplessness. "There is no permanent habitat of elephants in Sundargarh. They come from Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand where their habitats have shrunk. But is not clear how and why these elephants reached Orissa.

It is interesting to see that today the Good God uses, just as He has in the past, the animals and sometimes the elements as well. I am referring to the tsunami in 2004. What was not spoken of in the media, but what we learned on the spot in Sri Lanka, is that two days before Christmas in 2004, the advertisements on the buses and billboards, all throughout the country, but especially in Colombo, in the Catholic communities, there had been a message placed: *"Isn't Baby Jesus stupid and*

weak?" Just after Christmas, they got their answer. Out of the forty thousand deaths in Sri Lanka, thirty-five thousand were Buddhists. Certain temples in southern India were completely washed away, temples where curses are made. (For example, if you have a competitor who settles in your city, you go to the temple, pay the monks, and they will curse your competitor!) One temple simply disappeared.

God is not mocked. There is a God, and Scripture tells us that the elements and creation serve the Creator. Sometimes the Good God uses them. Of course, there are innocent people who perish, as happens everywhere, in war, etc. But divine justice is still there and it exists.

**To stay on the same topic, the media has been talking a lot about the recent catastrophe in Japan. What can you tell us about it? What have you been able to learn about it from the Japanese who assist at the Masses you say? What is the situation if the Church in Japan like, and that of Tradition in particular?**



**Fr. Couture:** The tsunami took place last March 11th. Until that day, we had no faithful in the village. A week later, I baptized a young lady whose family came from a village near Fukushima, twenty kilometers from the nuclear plant. The village was swept away by the receding waves. It was a Buddhist village, nevertheless. Well, thanks be to God, the parents of this young lady survived; only their house was damaged. It is a tragedy for Japan; they had terrible fears. They thought the plant was going to explode. Moreover, we had serious reports from very good sources saying that it was going to explode. But it did not explode, thanks be to God.

There is certainly some good that will come of it. Perhaps there will be conversions. Someone in France contacted us for this project and offered to give a miraculous medal to all those who survived the tsunami. Thanks to that young lady who came from the village, we will try to go there in September to meet the townspeople. We will give out miraculous medals so that they may thank the Blessed Virgin that they are still alive, thank the Good God, and place themselves in the hands of the Blessed Virgin.

The Japanese are really very, very grateful, and very expressive of this great virtue of gratitude. We sure need to learn from them how to be grateful. If you

In Japan, we have two Mass centers: one in Tokyo and one in Osaka, which is about 300 miles or more to the south. They are very small Mass centers. In Tokyo there are fifty faithful, and in Osaka twenty or thirty faithful. None of our faithful perished in the recent tragedy. On several websites (SSPX.org, *La Porte Latine*, DICI, the Asian District's site) we asked for donations to help the victims. They have truly suffered a great deal.



The SSPX's Mass center in Tokyo

the coming months, how we can help them.

It is difficult since the people have been evacuated from their villages, as there is still a risk of radiation. They have returned to their families or relatives, and they would like very much to go back to their villages, but they do not know where to go: "Should we go back, should we not?" They are not really sure.

On another note, what is really interesting is the pilgrimage to Akita that we have been making for five years now, in northern Japan. It is the Fatima of Japan, if you will. It is starting to become a large-scale pilgrimage, though, of course, it's not Chartres. We do it each year on the first weekend in May. This year our numbers went up to fifty. We started with fifteen. So we are moving forward gradually and we're making good progress.

Often, we have adult baptisms, as we had this year. It is a great joy to see these souls coming to the Faith.

So we ask for prayers for Japan, and if you wish to help materially, please contact us, and we will see what we can do.



SSPX's Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Akita

**Speaking of those opportunities that the faithful have to help in addition to prayer, you have come to the United States with a book that you are trying to promote, on the story of a Korean woman who was incarcerated by the Marxist regime. It is a very beautiful story divided into chapters that are easy to read. How did you come to know this person and how can the book help your work, Tradition as a whole, and Catholics here in the United States?**

**Fr. Couture:** First of all, Mrs. Rose Hu is a Chinese woman who spent twenty-six years in the concentration camps in China under Mao Tse-Tung, from 1955 to 1981.



Mrs. Rose Hu tells her story of incarceration as a Catholic under the Chinese Communist regime

She came to the United States in 1989, and after about ten years going to the New Mass in her parish, she discovered Tradition. Someone spoke to her about Communion in the hand, telling her that Communion in the hand was bad, and thus she discovered the Society of St Pius X. Now she is a member of the Society's Third Order. She made this extraordinary statement, *"My twenty-six years in communist prisons were the best preparation to be a member of the Society of St. Pius X, the best novitiate for me."*

Her book, *Joy in Suffering* (available from the [Asian District](#) or from [Angelus Press](#)), has been published in English and we have just finished the second printing. It was printed by the Soci-

ety of St. Pius X in Korea. It is now being translated into French and Spanish, and soon will be in Japanese too. It relates her story, which is simple, in very beautiful chapters. When she was arrested, she was twenty-two years old; she had converted at the age of sixteen. She was arrested because of her membership in the Legion of Mary. Everything in her life is linked to the Legion of Mary which, in Mao Tse-Tung's eyes, was his enemy number one, the spearhead of the Catholic Church in China.

[Taken from: *The Legion of Mary's Role in Strengthening the Church During the Communist Takeover of China.*]

The Legion of Mary in China: 1917 was probably the most significant year for the Church in the 20th century. World War I was devastating Europe, and it seemed as though the end was not near. Lenin and his followers sparked the Communist revolution in Russia, which would soon set ablaze many parts of the world with the evils of Communism.

It was also during 1917, that Our Lady appeared at Fatima, offering peace to nations and aiding her children in the struggle against the growing Russian Revolution.

History reveals much about the Divine Plan. For during the same time that those pivotal events were occurring, Our Lady was beginning to raise an army of her own. This army, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and having as its end spiritual goals, came from Ireland and was known as the Legion of Mary. It would not be long before this spiritual army of Our Lady would become a major enemy to the Communists in their revolutionary takeover of China during the 1950s.

During 1917, the foundations for the Legion of Mary were being laid. Frank Duff and other members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society were at

that time holding monthly meetings and doing spiritual and corporal works of mercy. They continued this format for the next four years, and from that gathering of Catholics emerged the Legion of Mary.

On the eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Nativity, September 7, 1921, a priest, Frank Duff and fifteen young women gathered together in the top-most backroom of a flat in a poor section of Dublin, Ireland. At this meeting, the very first of the Legion, they knelt before an image of Our Lady, the Holy Spirit was invoked and the rosary recited. Afterward, the small band discussed their proposed work of visiting cancer patients in South Dublin Union Hospital. From that day on, the group performed weekly apostolic work assignments and attended the weekly praesidium meeting. The membership soon grew to four praesidia, and on the Legion's first anniversary there were almost 100 active members in Dublin.

1927 marked the first year that a branch was started outside Dublin, in Waterford, Ireland. In 1928, the Legion was taken to Glasgow, Scotland, and the following year to England and Wales. From there, it spread to India, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The first Legion envoy left Ireland in 1934, and arrived in the United States. Two years later, Edel Quinn began her envoyship in missionary Africa, establishing thousands of praesidia before her death in 1944. From 1930 to 1950, over thirty full time envoys were sent throughout the world to build up the Legion. During those years, Legionaries labored in Central America, France, Egypt, Israel, Mexico, the Philippines and China.

The Rev. Fr. William Aedan McGrath (1906 – 2000), a Dubliner with the Missionary Society of St. Columban, arrived in China in 1930. Around the time the missionary priest had finished his rookie year, he was called to his bishop's office, where he learned of his first big assignment.

"You're to be a parish priest. I'm sorry to say there is no church there. I'm even more sorry to say there is no house. I don't know what you'll do, or where you'll live, but do your best," said the Most Rev. Edward Galvin, who co-founded with the Rev. Fr. John Blowick the St. Columban missionary society in 1918.

Off Fr. McGrath went, 100 miles north to Tsien-Kiang, where he stayed for the next sixteen years. He had twenty-four mission villages to cover. Without a car or even roads, he walked one day's journey from one village to the next, where he bunked down for a few days with parishioners in their mud-and-straw huts. It took two months to cover his parish, where he baptized, instructed, heard confessions, buried the dead and blessed graves. Whatever needed to be done, Fr. McGrath did it. He had no choice. There was no one else.

After a few months and already completely emotionally exhausted, Fr.

McGrath pleaded with Bishop Galvin to send him backup. A priest. A nun. Anyone. Bishop Galvin told him there was no one. Desperate, Fr. McGrath tried Catholic Action, a lay apostolic movement Pope Pius XI had promoted. He undertook this task, and his endeavor, which he later referred to as "McGrath's Folly," almost took him under. After reprimanding a group of parishioners, they took revenge by writing nasty letters about him to all the bishops in China.

Again Fr. McGrath pleaded with his bishop for help. Unable to send a priest, the bishop sent a book, "The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary."

Still stinging from his failed attempt with Catholic Action, the last thing Fr. McGrath wanted to do was try to coax parishioners to help him out. Nonetheless, he decided he'd give it a go, half-expecting and half-hoping it would fail – just to spite the bishop. For his first group, he rounded up six uneducated peasants. For six months, he absolutely forbade the men to tell their wives about the meetings, which were held – in secret – once a week, at midnight. That way, he reasoned, no one would know when it failed. If word got out about a second failure, that would be just too much.

Long after the village dogs had stopped barking and everyone in the village (except the six men and Fr. McGrath) had fallen asleep, the first meeting began with all seven kneeling and praying five decades of the rosary. Fr. McGrath followed the handbook and assigned to each of the men evangelization tasks that he had no time to do. The following week, villagers were still in the street at midnight, so Fr. McGrath – on the QT – ordered his six recruits to return in two hours. So at 2 a.m., the second meeting began. It had been a success! His apostles had accomplished all their tasks!

That was Fr. McGrath's introduction to the Legion of Mary. Formally, he joined the Legion by making his act of consecration to Christ through Mary, as suggested by St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) in his book "True Devotion to Mary," in which he explained that the best way to get to Christ is the way He came to the world – through His Mother.

Before Fr. McGrath knew it, his Legion grew and grew, but China was in utter turmoil, being ripped apart by the Chinese Communists (led by Mao Tse-Tung) and Nationalists (led by Chiang Kai-Shek), as well as thousands of Japanese invaders.

The Japanese, by 1931, had invaded Manchuria, a region in northeast China. The invaders wanted to get their hands on China's natural resources of coal, iron, gold and giant forests. When thousands of Japanese

soldiers marched into the village where Fr. McGrath lived around 1938, they gave the priest the boot, forcing him to leave his parish and return to Hanyang.

"That's the end of the diocese," he thought. "For without me, it's bound to fail."

After two and a half years, he was permitted to return. And what he found in his diocese greatly surprised him and, perhaps, hurt his ego a little. Not only had the diocese survived without him- it flourished. The Legionaries had done everything – baptized, instructed, witnessed marriages, everything except offer Mass and hear confessions.

By 1943, Fr. McGrath had six praesidia and 700 adult converts. But Fr. McGrath's diocese wasn't the only thing that flourished in China.

So had the power of Mao Tse-Tung, military leader of the Chinese Communist Party.

With atheist Mao winning most of the battles during the civil war that followed the Japanese occupation of China, the future didn't look so cozy for Catholics.

Archbishop Antonio Riberi, papal nuncio to China from 1946 to 1951, realized that all foreign clergy, nuns and religious would be kicked out of China, and that the Chinese clergy, nuns and religious would be thrown into prison. Archbishop Riberi knew something had to be done. And fast. In Africa, he had met Edel Quinn, the saintly Legion's envoy, and he had witnessed the evangelical power of the Legion of Mary. So he asked around and learned that only Fr. McGrath, in all of China, was working with the Legion of Mary.

In 1948, Fr. McGrath was enjoying some R&R back home in Ireland when he received a message from Superior General Michael O'Dwyer: "Archbishop Riberi, the nuncio from the Pope, has arrived in China and is looking for the Legion of Mary. He asked that you be taken out of your parish to help him establish the Legion in China."

Not wasting a second, Fr. McGrath cut short his stay and returned, post haste, to Shanghai.

At their meeting, the papal nuncio told the Legion priest, "Have you realized the impossibility of the situation? 500 million people and only 5,000 priests! Even if I doubled and tripled that number, the conversion of China is still impossible. Father, I want you, as fast as you can, to go all over China and start the Legion of Mary before it's too late."

"Your Excellency, do you not think it's too late? Mao will be in power in a few months," the Irish priest answered.

"Do what you're told," the archbishop ordered.

Fr. McGrath embraced his mission. Soon of Legionaries throughout China doubled, then tripled and continued to rapidly multiply.

Within one year there were 1,000 praesidia. Within two years, 2,000!

Legionaries, realizing just what was at stake with Mao and his regime riff-raff, played an important part in disseminating to Catholics the truth behind the Communist disinformation propaganda.

Around that time, the revolutionary Reds had advanced into northern China, where they were finally able to link up with Moscow, the power base of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, their chief supplier of weapons. It wasn't long before Mao drove Chiang Kai-Shek from mainland China to Formosa (now known as Taiwan).

On October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao stood in Tiananmen Square and announced the founding of the People's Republic of China – with himself the head of the beast. There were then in China 4 million Catholics, 3,080 foreign priests, 2,351 foreign sisters, 2,557 Chinese priests and 5,112 Chinese sisters.

Soon, the Communists became aware of the rapidly growing Legion of Mary. They ordered Fr. McGrath to stop his Legion activities in Chungking, but he protested saying that the Legion was a purely spiritual organization. He gave them a copy of the handbook and invited them to attend a meeting to see for themselves, which they did. Afterwards, they returned the handbook, with permission for the Legion to resume its work in Chungking.

Their comment was, "This is a great organization, just like Communism."

There are striking similarities to note between the Legion and international Communism. Each adopted the nomenclature of the Roman legion, and both organizations used the terms praesidium (the name for their meetings) and tessera (the title of their membership cards). Another interesting point: The color of the Communist is red, and that of the Legion is also red.

All remained fairly quiet during the first year of the Communist occupa-

tion. Then persecution of the Church began, directed first against foreign missionaries. Priests and sisters were arrested, falsely convicted and expelled from China. Many hundreds were sentenced to long prison terms within the Bamboo Curtain.

Up to that point, there had been no unfavorable mention by the Communists of the Legion. Then in the summer of 1950, the Communists proclaimed their intention to establish patriotic churches, which would be run by the government and be separated from Rome. That was called the Three Autonomies Movement, which began on July 28, 1950.

Under the guise of self-rule, self-support and self-propagation, they demanded absolute separation of the Chinese churches from any alignment with foreign congregations. Those same tactics had been followed in Communist-dominated countries of Europe, since setting up an "independent church" has always signified independence from all control but that of the Communist government. Propaganda in the official Communist Party-controlled press supported independence to such a degree that for months the Peking (Beijing) People's Daily devoted daily space to the patriotic obligation of Catholics throughout China to participate in the movement.

The real challenge had come. The Chinese hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church refused to support the new movement, and the Legion of Mary set to work informing and instructing the Catholic faithful about the issues at stake in that plot to undermine the Church.

When the Communists realized that the effort to separate Chinese Catholics from Rome was failing, they began a violent attack in the Communist press directed against Archbishop Riberi, the Catholic Central Bureau and the Legion of Mary. Within a year (1951), the internuncio was expelled from China and most of the leading priests were jailed, including Fr. McGrath. The Legion came under very fierce attacks by the press, which described Frank Duff as "that imperialist" and "of the party of those who are in power in Ireland."

It also stated, "This Handbook speaks without evasion of the fact that the Legion of Mary is like the legion of the ancient imperialists of Rome, which acted only for the tyrants of the age and killed people as one cuts down grass; this shows us that the Legion of Mary is indeed founded on these principles, without any doubt. We may know thus that the Legion is a secret army, which, under the guise of religion, really works for the imperialists."

Why was the Legion vilified in such a way?

The Catholics in China were a small and comparatively uninfluential minor-

ity, and the Legion was numerically less substantial. Fr. McGrath believed that the main reason was the “part played by the Legionaries in frustrating the Communist plan for a schismatic Catholic Church in China.”

The next Communist move was to suppress the Legion in Tientsin, Shanghai and other centers. Legionaries were ordered to register their names with the police. In Shanghai, where there were fifty-one praesidia, about fifty registration centers were set up and manned by a highly trained Communist staff, which had undergone an intensive training course that had even included studying the Legion handbook. A six-foot high notice board outside each center proclaimed: SECRET SUBVERSIVE ORGANIZATION, LEGION OF MARY MEMBER REGISTRATION CENTER. On each side of the notice board stood soldiers, in full battle attire. Even more alarming was the form that each member was expected to sign.

It read, “I, the undersigned, joined the reactionary Legion of Mary on ... and conducted secret counterrevolutionary and evil activities against the government, the people, and Soviet Russia. I, hereby, resign from the Legion of Mary and promise never to participate in such activities in the future.”

To register under these terms was equal to signing one’s death warrant, since “revolt against the country and having contact with imperialism” came with a punishment of death or life imprisonment. Signing also meant admitting to the false charges brought against the Legion and removed the member’s name from the ranks of Mary’s army.

Only a handful signed the forms, and most of those later returned and withdrew their registrations. The Legionaries, as a body, refused to give up their membership. Those in Shanghai wrote a letter, signed in their own blood, to the Most Rev. Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei, bishop of Shanghai.

“Your Excellency, we will follow you wherever you go,” read the letter. “We are proud to live in this age of persecution, and there can be no compromise.”

The refusal of Legionaries to register led to the arrest of thousands. Soon, every Legion officer was in prison. Among those was Johanna Hsiao, a girl in her early 20s, who before being jailed had set up 362 praesidia in the north of China. She was imprisoned in 1951 (and now lives in Ireland).

Even very young Legionaries showed heroic courage. Led by their 19-year-old president, the members of a junior praesidium marched down the public streets singing from the Gospel of St. Matthew 5:12-13, “Blessed are you when they shall persecute and calumniate you and say all that is

evil against you untruly in My Name. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is very great in Heaven.”

The total number of those executed by the Communists is almost unbelievable. In the 1950s, Time magazine estimated that between the years 1949 and 1952, 20 million people were put to death under Mao Tse-Tung. Another estimate is that between the years 1949 and 1970, the number increased to 60 million.

As for Fr. McGrath, he was released from prison in May 1954, and saw the injured state suffered by the Roman Catholic Church in China.

“At the end of 1954, only sixty-one (foreign missionaries) were still in the country, of whom twenty-one were in prison. In 1955, there were still two foreign bishops and twenty priests in China. Of these, one bishop and seventeen priests were imprisoned. Of the Chinese priests, about 500 had been imprisoned,” he said.

The Communists pressed on, attempting to establish a “church” independent from Rome. Their plans had been frustrated by the faithful priests, bishops and members of the Legion. In 1954, Pius XII wrote the encyclical ‘Ad Sinarum Gentem’, which took issue with the Three Autonomies Movement and strengthened the support against a reform church.

However, in 1954 and 1955, a new wave of arrests and persecutions assailed the loyal Catholics. The Communists began winning over priests and bishops, and by 1957, the Association of Patriotic Priests was founded. The next year, 1958, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was formally established.

What is the state of the Church in China today?

Before the Communist takeover, there were approximately 4 million Catholics. Today, it seems as though there is only the patriotic Chinese church, with its glorious parishes in Beijing, Shanghai, Canton, etc. But this is only a facade. The Roman Catholic Church is still alive inside China, although it is seldom able to communicate with Rome.

It is now being discovered that in central China there are between 10 and 12 million Catholics. These Catholics have no churches, but hear Mass in straw houses and do not wish to have anything to do with the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. It seems that after most of the priests and bishops had been imprisoned in the 1950s, and after almost all of the foreign missionaries had been expelled, the Chinese laity held the Church together. For years, the laity had very few priests, but they continued to evangelize, instruct and baptize. Legion of Mary members were among these laity.

The Legion of Mary in China is an extraordinary story. [Arch] Bishop Riberi, who was the Apostolic Nuncio in 1948, felt the revolution coming as early as 1947 (Mao took control in 1949). Then the Nuncio sent for Fr. McGrath, an Irishman, who had already founded the Legion of Mary in his small Chinese parish with extraordinary results. The Apostolic Nuncio said to Fr. McGrath: *"Mao will take control very soon. I give you the order to establish the Legion of Mary all over China, because Catholics will have to stand firm without priests."* In two years, he established nearly two thousand *prae-sidia*, and that is what saved the Catholics there and prepared many to martyrdom.



Archbishop Antonio Riberi,  
Apostolic Nuncio to China

Mrs. Rose Hu was part of the Aurora Girls' school in Shanghai, which was where Fr. McGrath started his national campaign. It was a school for wealthy families, and it succeeded against all odds. It grew like weeds; it spread by the grace of God. Many of those young girls who were later tortured stood firm. The book is her testimony, written under obedience to Fr. McGrath, her spiritual director then (+2000). It was he who told her, *"You have to put your story down in writing."* Her book, first written in Chinese, was read on Vatican Chinese Radio, so it is an important testimony. We have just translated it into English, and we hope that, a year or two from now, it will come out in French, Spanish, Japanese and perhaps in German.

Her example is instructive even for us priests, and will likely promote vocations in this wealthy, materialistic world, because it is the example of young people who stand firm in a heroic way.



Fr. W. Aedan McGrath

I'll give you an example taken from the book, one of the many anecdotes you'll find in it. One time Rose was sick with pneumonia. She was bedridden for two weeks, but was unable to find any medicine. Finally, she managed to have someone send her some by mail. Then, she got better, but as soon as she was back on her feet, she had to go back to work in the fields. As she was passing by a building with her friend Therese, they found an egg on the ground, an ordinary chicken's egg. For them, an egg was like a bottle of vitamins—it was a gift from heaven! So Therese took the egg and said, *"Rose, look! The Good God sent you an egg to get your strength back."* And Rose answered, *"But there are people who are still sick. As for me, I am better now, but there are other people who are still sick."* *"Yes, but you have to take it, because the Good God wants you to work."* *"No, no, no, I can't take*

*this egg. We'll talk about it this evening.*" So, they work all day in the fields, and came back to their quarters in the evening. They met up with their fellow Catholics, and Rose said, "No, no, no, I cannot take this egg. There are people who are still sick." So they passed on the egg from person to person, and it went around the whole group of fifteen people, to finally come back to Rose. Every one said, "There are others who are feeling worse than I am." And even though some of them were dying of hunger, they would say, "No, no, there are other people who need it more than I do." There could be found a heroic spirit of charity and sacrifice in these labor camps. In the end, they broke the egg, put it in a bowl of water, and made soup with that one egg; they ended up with a spoonful each. And when we asked Rose, "What did you do with the eggshell?" And she answered, "Oh, we ate it, because we could not leave traces."



Fr. Theresian Babu Xavier offers a First Mass at Palayamkotai, India

**Father, India has always received great help from the United States. We take advantage of the opportunity to thank our many benefactors and missionaries who come from the United States. What can you say today to the young Indian who has just been ordained? If you had to give him a few words of encouragement or of priestly advice for the future, what would you tell him?**

**Fr. Couture:** What am I going to tell him tomorrow morning at his first Mass, you mean? This: we have to live the priest's ideal that His Excellency spoke of this morning. That ideal is to live the vocation of the Society of St. Pius X. As I was saying a moment ago while speaking about the priests and bishops who turn to us for help, the Society is entering more and more into a new period, thanks to Archbishop Lefebvre, who kept not only the Holy Mass, but also the priesthood that goes with the Mass.

Archbishop Lefebvre said, "They are not attacking me personally, they are attacking Tradition." In the same way—if we continue the same analogy—it is not we who, I would say, put ourselves up on a pedestal in those areas of our missions, but it is rather what we represent: it is a kind of priesthood that has practically disappeared. And that is what I am going to tell him.

The priest has to make manifest those treasures that are linked to the true Catholic priesthood: the Mass, the sacraments, Catholic sermons. In a book published a few years ago in France about those who converted to the Faith at St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, our church in Paris, the author speaks of a university professor who received the grace of conversion because she was struck by the fact that before and after each sermon, the priest made the sign of the Cross. These are details that we do not think much of because we do it all the time, but, think about it, a university

professor received that grace through these simple signs of the Cross. We really hold in our hands treasures of grace. I remember one of our faithful here in Asia, a doctor and a former Protestant, , who was converted at twenty-five or twenty-six years old at the moment a priest blessed the crucifix her friend had just given her.

So, on one hand, I will tell this newly ordained priest tomorrow, *"Always remember what you represent, and that people turn to us because we have these treasures of grace, these channels of grace: the sacraments, Catholic doctrine, etc."* And on the other hand, that alone is not enough. For us, young priests, we must live our ideal.

Priests are not canonized for saying Mass; otherwise all priests would be canonized. They are canonized for the virtues they have practiced, for having lived the holy Mass. That is what other people need to see as well. We young priests in the Society, we need to unceasingly remind ourselves of that fact. When he described the ideal virtues of a priest in his exhortation *Haerent Animo*, St. Pius X wanted his priests to be holy. And I think this is the most beautiful example we can give, and the most beautiful gift we can give to the people in those places where we send our priests: to present to them priests who not only carry treasures in their hands, the treasures of the Church, but who also live them, who are convinced of the duty that is theirs to lead a life worthy of those treasures.



Pope St. Pius X:

**Father, do you have perhaps a few words for the faithful, a message that you would like to send to them in particular, and perhaps in a more special way to young people?**

First of all, thank you to all those who pray for the missions. I know that people are praying for the missions everywhere, in the families, in the schools, adults as well as children. Many times I have been assured that it is so. Every year I receive short notes, post cards from the Society's schools, even from children in primary school, saying, "Here, Father, we have offered our Lenten sacrifices for the missions." That moves us. The Archbishop often used the example of the garden hose. We, priests, missionaries, we are at the end, and we see the water flowing out. And then I see these faithful throughout the world praying for the missions, they are at the faucet. So I want to assure you that the graces you pray for are getting through at our end. The graces are coming through. Last Saturday, a week ago, we baptized a Muslim lady in Singapore. A week before that, we had baptized a Buddhist. There are adult conversions. We see it. It is mysterious. But grace is coming through, for sure. Sometimes, it is even simultaneous. I have many proofs of this. I have seen with my own eyes the power of prayer, of the communion of Saints. So, a sincere

thanks to all those who pray, who make sacrifices, offer their Communion, their rosaries, those who remember the missions.

On the other hand, the harvest is overflowing. For those young people who are looking for adventure, for a life in which they can be enriched, the missionary life still exists. Pray for vocations, perhaps for your own vocation. Let the young people ask themselves, seeing the abundance of the harvest, "*Wouldn't God perhaps need me too? Why wouldn't He send me too?*" As the prophet said, "*Send me, Lord! If you need my help, here I am. What wilt thou have me do?*" It was St. Francis Xavier, a graduate of the Sorbonne, who wrote around 1544, in one of the most famous passages of his letters to the Jesuits in Rome, "*I wish I could run through the hallways of the Sorbonne and shout out to the students, 'What are you doing? Think of your eternity.*"

*What will you present to the Good God on the day of your death? If you have the time and the talents, don't waste that time, those talents, your whole life, in vain and useless things. Go, work in the harvest, in order to reap eternal fruits one day'.*" St. Francis Xavier saw what was going on; he was in India at that time. He would say the same today.

So, thank you, keep courage, and think about your life on earth and in eternity. Do a retreat if you have doubts, if you are looking for your state of life. It would be good, perhaps, before starting in one way of life or another, to put things straight: "*What is the best use I can make of my life, considering the glory of Heaven and eternity?*" At the same time, be assured of our prayers. In answer to your prayers, you can be assured of ours, especially that the Good God may plant the seeds of ever more numerous missionary vocations amongst our youth.

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A word should be mentioned also about the Legion's effect in South Korea and the Philippines. The Legion was started in South Korea by the Missionary Society of St. Columban fathers after they had been expelled from China in the early 1950s. There were 350,000 Catholics in South Korea at that time. The Church was growing rapidly, and the Legionary work was evangelization and catechetical instruction. In just thirty years, by 1982, the Legion had grown to 47,000 active members and 3,400 prae-



A statue of St. Francis Xavier at his tomb at Panaji in North Goa, India

sidia. A statistic of February 1984, showed there were 87,000 active members and 6,700 praesidia! South Korea alone brought in 60,000 converts during 1981, and had – in the cathedral parish alone – approximately 2,000 parishioners attending daily Mass.

The Legion went to the Philippines in 1941, when a praesidium was started at Santo Thomas University. During the next forty years, the Legion grew at an incredible rate. By 1982, there were 200,000 active members and 14,700 praesidia. By 1985, Santo Thomas University had 18 praesidia, and there were then 15,500 praesidia in the Philippines.

The late Archbishop Michael O'Dougherty of Manila, who had seen the change in the Philippine Church since the advent of the Legion said, "I can now dream dreams, and I say to myself, this is the only Catholic nation of the Orient, why should it not convert the Orient?"

At the time, 1985, Fr. McGrath was stationed in the Philippines, training hundreds of Legionaries for the missionary life and teaching them Chinese.

When the Bamboo Curtain opens, the soldiers of Mary will be ready, and the Queen of Heaven will lead her spiritual army into China and once again offer them her Divine Son.

Taken from: The Legion of Mary's Role in Strengthening the Church During the Communist Takeover of China. by Rev. Fr. Francis J. Peffley, <http://www.legionofmary.org/files/LOMChina.doc> and from Therese Marie Moreau, Warrior Priest - Father McGrath and the Battle for the Soul of China, The Remnant Newspaper, July 2007

OUR LADY OF VICTORIES CHURCH,  
*consecrated on March 1, 1997*  
*by H.E. Bishop Fellay,*  
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The SOCIETY OF ST. PIUS X  
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