

Father Director's letter

No # 1

Dear Knights of the Immaculata!

When Saint Maximilian wrote to the knights, they used to name his messages "Our Father Director's letters". After his death his successors, the international moderators of the MI, continued long time this tradition for the simple reason that it was easier for the knights to use the term 'director' than the somehow complicated canonical term "international moderator". As the Divine Providence through the voice of the superiors has chosen your servant as international moderator of the "Militia Immaculatae – traditional observance", allow me to go in the footsteps of the holy founder and send you more or less regularly "Father Director's letter". As the knights in those times recognized Saint Maximilian both as their father and guide, so today I ask humbly your prayers, that I would become a faithful echo of him, so that today, when we lack terribly true fathers and guides, he may be again and even more "our beloved Father director".

In this first letter I wish to inform you about the origins of the Militia Immaculatae in its traditional observance and to give you a brief historical account from its beginnings until our times.

It was in our first year of the seminary, in 1981, when the leaders of the traditional Catholic Youth Movement in Germany (KJB) issued a bulletin consecrated to the life and the apostolic work of Saint Maximilian Kolbe. We Seminarians were fascinated to discover this Saint of our times, who was so absolutely traditional in this deep faith and apostolic zeal but at the same time working with contemporary modern technical means. A Saint who fascinates young people even our times.

This question about the conversion of young people came up again, when since 1986 we were appointed to Africa. Inspired by the message of the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima (the three volumes of Frere. Michel of the Holy Trinity) and the biography of Saint Maximilian Kolbe (written by Maria Winowska), Fr. Loic Duverger then founded in 1988 a movement for girls, the "Companie de l'Immaculee". As the MI counts three groups, the girls were divided in "children, servants, and apostles of the Immaculata", each of them would realize more generously the requests of the Immaculate Heart in Fatima. Each of them would become more generous in striving for the conversion of other girls. The results were overwhelming: After 5 years of existence, groups of the "CI" were founded in various regions of the capital of Gabon to convert the children in the neighborhood, many "apostles" were engaged as catechists for 1500 children in our Mission Saint Pius X. During the jubilee of the 75 anniversary of Fatima the CI played many times the theater about the apparitions and attracted hundreds of new people to the Church. But the most marvelous fruit was the inner change of many young girls who lived an authentic inner life and showed sometimes heroic courage to defend the faith within the pagan milieu or even family. Some of them brought their parents, brothers and sisters, to conversion. Amongst those who died an early death due to the various tropic diseases, we could observe a rare degree of virtue and even holiness. Such incredible surprises confirmed us in the conviction about the outstanding power of the Immaculata in our times, the exceptional importance of Fatima, and the necessity of doing all our apostolic work only with HER and under HER command.

But it was only in 1994, when surprisingly appointed to begin the work of Catholic Tradition in Poland, that we discovered really, who was Saint Maximilian Kolbe and his Militia. The reading of his letters and conferences in the maternal language made us discover a universal genius, both contemplative and most active, a theologian of the deepest mysteries of Mary and a master of organization who used the modern technical means and inventions to make Our Queen known and loved by millions of people. This always mortally sick little monk founded one of the most important Marian movements in the world, the third after the "Legion of Mary", and the "Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima", opened with no material means a convent called "City of the Immaculata" who within 15 years became the largest in the world since the medieval times with almost 1000 inhabitants. Not enough to enkindle the flame of love

towards Mary in his fatherland, he set out for the Mission in far Asia with the desire to bring to her footsteps "a billion souls". Finally, after a heroic life his heroic death in the hungerbunker in Auschwitz dying for a co-prisoner, a father of a family.

When 1998 we settled in Warsaw to open the first priory, it was obvious, that we paid frequent visits to the nearby Niepokalanów, the City of the Immaculata. It was, as if the Saint himself would meet us, when we contemplated the remnants of this gigantic apostolate (museum, original chapel and the rooms where the Saint lived, the cemetery with his heroic companions etc.). It was a unique experience to have long conversations with the elder brothers who knew him personally. However, we had to discover the other side of the MI: the place was full of charismatic movements, the bookstore packed with very liberal and modernist books, we were often witness of liturgical ceremonies and meetings as a gathering of the masses to excite empty emotions similar to those you can find in any open-air rock concert. In 1997 were also published the new statutes of the MI very different from those before. One of the bestsellers was a book of the general moderator of the Militia, Fr. Simbula, who criticized strongly the holy founder for this narrowness and 'being stuck in the opinions of his times'. When asking the elder brothers who knew the Saint about these changes, we heard often saying him sadly: "now all is changed". The 'knight of the Immaculata' became a pious bulletin full of modern allusions, and empty of the original tone.

At the same time we were approached by some of our young faithful who asked, whether we could not restart the Militia Immaculatae exactly as Saint Maximilian founded it. As Catholic Poland since the twenties was deeply influenced by the MI, the re-founding of it exactly in the same spirit in which the Holy Founder established it ...

This request obliged to analyze, whether this idea would make sense, as we had in the Catholic Tradition already quite a number other Marian movements. To found just yet another one, could divide the number and strength of the existing. So little prayer crusade was organized, that the Immaculata would show us her will.

At this moment we discovered a yet deeper aspect of the Militia and its holy founder and we realized that **this movement is unique in the world and perfectly appropriate for our times** for the following reasons:

1/ As the name indicates, *Militia Immaculatae* reminds the Militant Church, the true Catholic Church on earth in its permanent fight against the devil, sin and error. Since 50 years these essential catholic themes had been removed from the minds of the faithful who are taught to strive for universal peace and mutual respect of all religions. What is worse: since the same time the everlasting and most important realities about heaven, hell, purgatory, death, judgement, fight against the devil and conversion from error to the only catholic truth ... had been widely abandoned and replaced by the desire of unifying the world in a mutual understanding and peace. The masonic new world order has become the ideal of many Catholics.

Against this modernist plague the MI appears as a remedy against the pacifism of our times and becomes a strong reminder of the only true perspective: we are on earth to fight for the salvation of souls. It emphasizes of the everlasting values and the right use of our short time on earth. It is in its definition anti-ecumenical calling of the conversion of all dissidents, false religions to the only true Church.

2/ This idea of spiritual fight so needed in our times provokes the enthusiasm of generous souls, especially the youth, to give herself up for a great and fascinating ideal. In our individualistic times, we are in great danger to close up ourselves in our own spiritual comfort and become self-centered and to understand religious practice only as private affair. After such a long period of terrible crisis we risk to forget, that we belong to Holy Mother Church and responsible for all members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The MI makes us deeply understand the great NEW commandment of Our Lord: "to love our neighbor, as he has loved him", that is to do what we can to strive for the salvation of souls running towards the abyss of eternal damnation. We will be happy and thankful, whenever somebody in the Church returns to the true values and wish to bring HER and with HER the whole Catholic Tradition back in each place, from the smallest parish until the Vatican. We will not point to the poor spiritually sick souls with despise saying 'with such a heretic I don't want to have anything to

do', but we want to do what we can to bring him back to the unchangeable truth of Our Lord through the Immaculata.

3/ The MI gives us back our true identity as Catholics together with the deeper understanding of our role here on earth, to become a soldiers of Jesus Christ striving for the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth. To accomplish this life task, we have received the sacrament of Confirmation. The Militia Immaculatae is not so much another movement and associations amongst many with its prayers and practices, but it is essential like a NEW LAW for our life, that says: whatever you do, you do it as instrument in Our Lady's hands, as knight in her army to attack the enemy by converting him, and so to extend the kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. If this law penetrates our whole life, we will not any more waste our time with nothing, but fill our short period on earth with a maximum of greatest deeds, eternal deeds, salvation of souls.

4/ Another fascinating aspect: this movement is eager to use the most modern means in the service of the Immaculata. It makes the contemporary man have a new, a Catholic approach to the mass-media, which are mostly abused by the powers of darkness as powerful means of the worst of temptations. As anyway the youth is addicted to their electronic devices, the MI turns this addiction into the service of the Immaculata and the salvation of souls. This aspect can bring many people from outside to join the MI, as they see, that this movement perfectly adapts to the situation and needs of our times.

But in the same time it is deeply grounded in the spirit of prayer and sacrifice as the most important weapons of the knights to save souls. It applies fully the request of Our Lady of Fatima to pray and do sacrifices, because so many souls go to hell, as there is nobody who prays and does sacrifices for them. Moreover, the methods of Saint Maximilian for the apostolic prayer are perfectly fit for the difficulties of our times to have a good prayer life.

5/ The most important point, however, consists in the place of the Our Lady, the Immaculata in our life. The MI applies in concrete daily life the claims of Saint Bernard and all the Marian saints, especially the true devotion of Saint Louis Mary Grignon who teaches to do all things through Mary, with Mary, in and for Mary. It puts into the concrete and generous practice the great truths of Her Immaculate Conception and especially of her role as Mediatrix of all graces of conversion and sanctification for all people. It makes understand the knight about the importance of the Immaculata in his personal life, and specially HER request to help her to save from eternal damnation her beloved children who are yet lost in error and sin. Here the Catholics learns every day, what is his role in the world and how important he is in the greatest work a man can do here on earth: to give others "all the best" of eternal happiness. In the same time it teaches him the necessary humility: alone he can do nothing, but he can do everything as instrument of the Immaculata, as her faithful knight.

6/ It is true, all these points can be found also in the Legion of Mary which already was re-established in its fidelity to Tradition in several countries. But the Legion of Mary is built according to the pattern of the Roman Legion, a movement of elite soldiers, what essentially demands very much from its members. On the contrary, the Militia Immaculatae goes to everybody, even to the laziest, and demands almost nothing to become a knight. It is movement of Masses to throw everybody at the footsteps of Our Lady, forcing him to give HER at least one little finger – she would manage it afterwards to take his hand and his full self. The Philippine Legion of Mary discovered in the MI an extraordinary means to engage the many people visited weekly by the legionaries to bind them closer to Our Lady by becoming Her knight.

7/ Even founded for the large Masses, the movement contains all possibilities of our collaboration in the work of salvation: it invites those who want to serve the Immaculata individually (MI 1), but also foresees the common apostolate in groups, circles, associations to reach a better and wider apostolic result (MI 2). And finally it invites the most fervent members to join the spiritual elite tending to total surrender and heroic life consecration to HER (MI 3).

Never such a movement has yet been established in the world, and it carries the universality of its Holy Founder: at the same time totally contemplative and active, respecting each individual effort and gathering Masses, englobing the idea of highest intellectual work (Academies of the Immaculata) and the most practical realizations, the everlasting unchanging catholic faith with 2000 years of Tradition with the most modern skill and inventions of our times.

The General superior agreed with the proposed arguments and allowed the foundation of the MI traditional observance in Poland. On May 6, 2000, the first Saturday of the month of Mary, around 50 Catholic faithful were the first to become Knights of the Immaculata. They received the "dyplomik" (little diploma), a copy of that written and signed by St. Maximilian himself. The fruits of this foundation were immediate: increase of generosity amongst the knights, regular prayer life, and apostolic spirit, expressed specially in an intensive increase of the written apostolate (bulletins, books, brochures, flyers) which made the Catholic Tradition known in Poland. Thanks to the publishing of the very texts of Saint Maximilian Kolbe and his fellow knights before the 2nd World War, many faithful could easily make the immense difference and even contradiction between the novelties within the Church in the spirit of Vatican II and the spirituality and ideals of the first 50 years of the MI.

In 2002 the traditional Capuchin Fathers of Morgon desired to join the MI and to found it in France. In 2004 the first American priests founded the MI in some priories and chapels of the US, followed in 2006, in Switzerland. But all the beginning were somehow the individual engagements of 'fans' of Saint Maximilian and the movement generally was unknown in the traditional world (except Poland). Only the last 3 years it seemed that Our Lady herself wanted her little army grow. Without any special advertisement or publicity more and more faithful got interested, thanks to the publication of the brochures and books about the MI and establishment of 3 important websites, in Poland, in Switzerland, and in Asia. Within 3 years, the number of the knights more than doubled from around 5000 in 2013 to around 13 000 in 2016. Until now the care of the MI in the different countries was left to the initiative of the MI priests who individually by their proper initiative tried "to do something" with the permission of their superiors. In order to unite the different efforts and to constitute the MI as a little army of the Catholic Tradition, the General Superior – the supreme authority of the MI – delegated your servant to be the international coordinator or in the terms of Saint Maximilian 'the director' of the MI.

If you meditate a bit longer about the seven points above concerning the importance of the MI in our specific times, you may understand, why it is our dream to present 100 000 knights to the footsteps of Our Lady for Her 100th anniversary of Her apparitions in Fatima. When in 1917 gigantic antichristian armies emerged in the world (Freemasonry in Rome, Communism in Moscow), Our Lady answered with Fatima and the foundation of the MI. In 2017 the antichristian armies celebrate their anniversary as a symbol of triumph that they dominate the whole world, don't you think, that Our Lady wishes again to answer with her little army, "HER apostles of the latter times" (Saint Grignon de Montfort), her children consecrated to HER Immaculate Heart (Fatima), HER faithful Knights (Saint Maximilian Kolbe)?

Let me therefore finish with on humble request to each one of you: on the 14 August we celebrate the 75 anniversary of the heroic death of Saint Maximilian. Would you please make all possible efforts, to find ONE Catholic and to convince him to join the Militia Immaculatae until that date?!

On the feast of the "MARY THE QUEEN", the 31 May 2016
With my priestly blessings
Yours thankfully
Fr. Karl Stehlin