

**EDEL QUINN  
LAY APOSTLE AND MISSIONARY  
IN THE CHURCH OF TODAY**

**SUMMARIUM.** - Edel Quinn, iuvenis hibernica nostri temporis (1907-1944) considerari potest sub multiplici aspectu ut exemplum apostoli et missionarii laici. Vita et spiritualitas eius in mysterio Ecclesiae Corporis Mystici — cardine totius organizationis apostolicae « Legionis Mariae » — veluti resumuntur. Labor apostolicus, primum in Hibernia et Anglia dein in Africa, fuit magnum servitium Ecclesiae praestitum; etenim « signa temporis » praevidens laicos apostolos ubique suscitavit efformavitque. Ipsa ergo ut apostolus missionarius et apostolorum efformatrix est donum Dei pro Ecclesia hodierna, quam virtutibus illustrat et peculiari charismate datat.

Each epoch has its saints, raised up by the Lord in His Church and endowed by the Holy Spirit with a special mission. They bring a clear message from Heaven to their fellowmen and are given a particular work to do according to the needs of the times. To them is confided the work of preparing the means of interior reform at the cross-roads of history and pointing out the way to genuine renewal.

Among the heroines of sanctity our own days, we must count Edel Mary Quinn. This young Irish woman consumed her existence in the heart of East Africa, as an Envoy of the Legion of Mary. Her life, a veritable poem of heroism, is a compelling example of the lay and missionary apostolate, and is all the more attractive because of the spirit of joviality and absolute self-forgetfulness which characterized her.

The fame of sanctity which surrounds Edel Quinn has reached far beyond the bounds of the Legion of Mary and her native country, and is already truly worldwide. Her life story, written by the able and competent Cardinal Suenens, has proved itself a « best-seller » in modern hagiography. It has been translated and repeatedly reprinted, not only in the more important European languages but also in the tongues of the distant Orient.<sup>1</sup>

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\* These pages are but an elementary presentation of the figure of Edel Quinn, inspired by the only existing and accessible sources of knowledge of her life and spirituality:

L. J. SUENENS, *A Heroine of the Apostolate, Edel Quinn. Envoy of the Legion of Mary to Africa*. Dublin 1962. — F. DUFF, *Edel Quinn*. Dublin 1963. — *The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*. Dublin 1965. — L. J. SUENENS, *Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary*. Cork.

<sup>1</sup> It has been published, or is under publication, in the following languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian, Flemish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean,

Appeals that Edel Quinn be raised to the honours of the altars continue to flow into Montfort House, Dublin, the central seat of the Legion, especially in recent months. The Cause for her Beatification is already under way in Rome.

The popularity of this Irish legionary is due no doubt to her sympathetic personality and the *timeliness* her of message. Hers is a message which has gained new importance in virtue of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Edel is a lay apostle of our times. As a woman too, she sets an example of the apostolic mission of women in the Church today. She is to be numbered among the precursors of the movement, in virtue of her having opened wide the fields of the modern apostolate by the uncompromising gift of herself and the sanctity of her life. With keen insight Archbishop Riberi said of her: « her life has become a factor destined to influence by sheer force of example the course of history ». <sup>2</sup> In this series of studies Edel Quinn finds her rightful place beside those other great women — Catharine of Siena, Teresa of Jesus, Edith Stein — who consecrated their lives to the service of the Church.

### I - HER LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY <sup>3</sup>

Edel Quinn was born at Greenane, near Kanturk, Co. Cork (Ireland) on September 14th 1907. Because of his office, her father, an official of the Bank of Ireland, had to change residence on various occasions, until eventually in 1924 he settled down with his family in Dublin. At the age of seventeen Edel began her commercial career, and was employed as secretary to a firm importing building materials. Her life, during those youthful days, is characterized by her conscientious application to her work as a typist, and her participation with girl friends at tennis, musical recitals and operettas. Under the mantle of this apparently insignificant way of life, Edel was really laying the foundation for future heroism and sanctity. A growing intimacy with the divine Guest of her heart and a progressive mastery of self matured her call to the religious life.

She came to know the Legion of Mary at the very dawn of its foundation and quickly passed from being a mere active member to the responsible office of President of the Praesidium « Refugium Peccatorum ». She proved herself most efficient in the difficult work carried out by her group, namely, the rescuing of « street-

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Slavonic... The 1963 English edition has brought that to the 90,000 mark. We know of a fourth edition in French and a third in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> SUEÑENS, *A Heroine* ... p. X.

<sup>3</sup> Only the more outstanding event's of Edel's life are indicated. For more detailed information cf. the biographies indicated.

girls ». And it was in this apostolate that the Legion achieved its first outstanding victory, thereby gaining respect and prestige in Dublin.

At the age of twenty four Edel refused a most attractive proposal of marriage and decided instead to become a Poor Clare in the convent at Belfast (Ireland). She was already getting things in order and preparing for her entry among the Poor Clares when an unexpected and heartrending event providentially changed the whole course of her life. An internal hemorrhage revealed that Edel's health was gravely undermined by an advanced state of tuberculosis. The doctors obliged her to abandon the idea of becoming a nun and prescribed complete rest in a sanatorium. Hope of a cure was very faint indeed.

Our young patient spent eighteen months in the sanatorium at Newcastle; she passed her time between meditation and reading and the consoling of the sick by word and example. It was here she came to know the books of her favourite authours: Dom Marmion, Dom Vonier, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

After spending a year and six months in the sanatorium, she decided it was time to leave, despite medical opinion.<sup>4</sup> So she returned to her family and shortly afterwards she was again engaged as secretary to a motor engineering firm. She also returned to her active apostolate in the Legion of Mary.

But presently various circumstances were to fire her with zeal for new conquests. She gave up her weeks of vacation and went to Wales to help implant the Legion there. It was a tentative experience, and as a result she decided she would be even prepared to remain in England as an Envoy of the Legion and find work at some firm in Chester. She proposed her resolution to the Concilium: « I would like », she said, « to return to England, settle in Chester, and, with that place as centre, work to plant the Legion everywhere ». While she awaited an answer, the hour of Providence struck and God indicated other plans for His chosen servant.

The call came from distant Africa, where the Legion had already set firm roots. It was in the form of an urgent appeal from an Envoy in South Africa. But as plans for Edel's going there were beginning to take shape, a second appeal arrived from Central Africa. After much deliberation, it was agreed that she would go to this latter mission instead. In accepting the proposal to go to

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<sup>4</sup> Edel's « discharge » from the Sanatorium is a delicate circumstance in her life. Frank Duff has this to say about it: « The circumstances under which she departed from Newcastle are not of the very clearest. I have no doubt that the distinguished Roman Official, who is popularly called the Devil's Advocate, will be asking awkward questions there. It is not absolutely certain that she got a clear bill or a clear permission ». Cf. F. DUFF, o. c. 4.

Central East Africa, she said simply: « This is the happiest day of my life ».<sup>5</sup>

Toward the end of October 1936, she set out for Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. She lost no time in getting down to work, and the following December 7th she founded the first Praesidium in East Africa, under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception.

During the eight years of her apostolate in Africa, Edel's mission consisted in the founding of Legionary groups, their organization and assistance. A circular letter from His Excellency Msgr. Riberi, then Apostolic Delegate, opened wide to her the doors of all the mission centres. Kenya, Uganda, Tanganika, Malawi, Zanzibar became the vast field of her apostolic activity. In an old two-seater car, she travelled, intrepid and untiring, hundreds of miles through the heart of the African bush. At the request of Archbishop Leen, she even made her way to the distant Island of Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean.

These were years of most exacting activity. But no difficulty was unsurmountable for Edel Quinn. She held out against fatigue and exhaustion. Under the veil of an angelic smile, she succeeded in concealing the terrible malady that continued to undermine her health.

Even a fibre like hers could resist no longer and, in mid-March 1941, a grave attack of pleurisy obliged her to go from one hospital to another in South Africa. But time was precious and pressing and so at the beginning of January 1943 we find her back in Nairobi, the centre of her activities from the beginning. Notwithstanding the rapid progress of her malady, she did not spare herself the fatigue of long apostolic journeys. The following year, now literally consumed, she returned to Nairobi for good. It was the end. She died on May 12th 1944. Her temporal work was over and her message to the world began.

#### SPIRITUAL TRAITS

It is not easy to describe Edel Quinn's spiritual life. She was always careful to conceal the rich graces that adorned her soul beneath the veil of a smile and a ready sense of humour. Her letters, full of information and questions and interspersed with funny and joking remarks, scarcely allow us to guess the profundity of her interior life. Some intimate notes, as brief as they are concise, which have been preserved, permit us to peer at the sanctuary of her soul. It is on these latter especially that we would like to fix our attention.

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<sup>5</sup> Obvious reasons compel us to shorten considerably the description of this decisive moment for Edel, in which important and graphic factors intervene. Cf. SUENENS o. c. pp. 75-80.

Edel's spiritual life is as solid and rich as the books which formed and nourished it: the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, the Works of St. John of the Cross and the Little Flower, the writings of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, Dom Columba Marmion, Dom Vonier and Archbishop Leen. From each she assimilated the best and wove it into her life: Christ and Mary, the Cross and Eucharist, abnegation and trust, seemingly opposed aspects of the spiritual life which baffle modern writers were beautifully harmonized by her: the Christo-centric and Marian life; liturgy and contemplation; prayer and the active apostolate; the cross and joy; interior solitude and assiduous attendance to human affairs.

The distinguishing features of her spirituality are undoubtedly her profoundly Christo-centric life, expressed by her intimacy with and devotedness to Christ in the Eucharist, the ardour of her dedication to Mary and her apostolic zeal and generosity. Moreover, her life was sealed by the cross of ill health — tuberculosis — which brought her earthly existence to a premature end.

It was all in the service of the Church and the missions.

## II - EDEL QUINN AND THE CHURCH

Edel Quinn is buried in Nairobi. At the foot of a celtic cross of Kenya marble, under the standard of the Legion, an epitaph recalls « the great services to the Church » of this young Irish woman. Her whole life was a service rendered to the Church. However, before serving the Church by her apostolic work, she lived its mystery in her interior life. Her mission in the Church may be summarized as follows: vital union with the mystery of the Church and lay and missionary apostolate.

### *In the Mystical Body of Christ*

A vital participation in the mystery of Christ's union with His Mystical Body, namely the Church, is essential in the life of Edel. It is true that in her writings, which are few and very brief, we do not come across complicated expositions of or meditations on this theme, but she lived its mystery and helped others by her example to penetrate it ever more deeply. A friend of her girlhood days writes in this connection: « The doctrine of the Mystical Body took me a little out of my depth. Of late it has struck me that whereas we believe Our Lord's words: 'As long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me', Edel not only believed it but realised it and based her whole spiritual life upon it... It was

only later on, as a nun, that I realised what a firm grasp she had of the doctrine of the Mystical Body ». <sup>6</sup>

Edel had learned that doctrine especially from the pages of the Legion Handbook, which dedicates a profound and solid chapter to the Mystical Body of Christ and makes of it the very nucleus of the Legionary organization.

We shall try to transcribe the more significant passages. Edel made them the subject of her reading and frequently explained them at the meetings. Her notes too are a vital echo of these pages.

« In all those whom they served the Legionaries were to see the Person of Jesus Christ Himself. What they did to those others — even the weakest and lowest — they were to remember that they did it to Our Lord Himself... These principles, upon which the Legion system is built, are a consequence of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ ». <sup>7</sup>

After expounding with precision the scriptural texts on which this doctrine is based, the Handbook continues :

« This truth has been described as the central dogma of Christianity... The activity of the Mystical Body is the activity of Christ Himself... Baptism only sanctifies because it establishes between Christ and the soul that vital connection by which the sanctity of the Head flows into its members. The other Sacraments, and above all the Eucharist, exist for the purpose of intensifying the union between the Mystical Body and its Head. In addition, that union is deepened by the operations of faith and charity, by the bonds of government and mutual service in the Church, by labour and suffering rightly submitted to, and generally by every act of the Christian life ». <sup>8</sup>

With like force and precision, the Handbook explains Mary's function in the Church as Mother of the Mystical Body :

« The sole purpose of Mary's existence is to conceive and bring forth the whole Christ, that is the Mystical Body with all its members perfect, and fitly joined together (Eph. iv, 15-16), and one with its Head, Jesus Christ. Mary accomplishes this in co-operation with, and by the power of, the Holy Spirit, Who is the life and soul of the Mystical Body. It is in her bosom and subject to her maternal care that the soul grows up in Christ and comes to the age of His fullness (Eph. iv, 13-15) ». <sup>9</sup>

The entire legion apostolate centres round this Marian perspective :

« The Legionaries do not really bring Mary to help them in their service of the other members of the Mystical Body. She it is who summons them to assist her... As no one can even attempt

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<sup>6</sup> *Ib.* pp. 66-67.

<sup>7</sup> *The Official Handbook* ... p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Ib.* p. 160-161.

<sup>9</sup> *Ib.* p. 161.

the service of his neighbour other than in the company of Mary, similarly, no one can discharge this duty worthily except by entering to some degree into the intentions of Mary. It follows that the more close the union with Mary, the more perfectly is fulfilled the divine precept of loving God and serving one's neighbour (I John iv, 19-21) ». <sup>10</sup>

« ...Let all this teach the Legionary his sublime vocation in the Mystical Body. It is to supply what is wanting to the mission of Our Lord. What an inspiring thought for the Legionary: that Christ stands in need of him to bring light and hope to those in darkness, consolation to those who are afflicted, life to those who are dead in sin. It goes without saying that it must be the Legionary's place and duty to imitate in a quite especial manner the surpassing love and obedience which Christ the Head gave His Mother, and which the Mystical Body must reproduce ». <sup>11</sup>

Undoubtedly, we have in these pages the secret and source of Edel Quinn's spirituality and her vital union with the Church. The whole of this doctrine is reflected in her life, as is clear from her intimate notes. Her writings reveal, above all, that she had attained that filial union with Christ and with Mary which is described by the Handbook and which made her an instrument of supernatural help to others, thereby leading them to a perfect christian way of life.

### *Union with Christ*

« We seize in Edel's writings » says Cardinal Suenens, « the profound Christocentrism of her piety. Constantly she returns to Him Who alone has access to the Father, to Him Who offers God the unique and perfect adoration of the human race ». <sup>12</sup> This was a fundamental attitude in her life, expressed equally during her long hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and during her unending journeys through the African bush. Scattered phrases like the following, which are replete with her personal experience, were part of her life before being committed to writing, and reveal the sublimity of her union with Christ:

« To be with Him in union with Mary — just loving Him in my soul during the day, during travelling, uniting my actions with the similar actions done by Him whilst on earth. 'Master, where dwellest Thou? And they abode with Him'. My privilege is the same. Rest in His presence, and my Guardian Angel will adore Him for me. Silence. Everything is His, through Mary. Delight to give oneself more and more in everything to Him through Her ». <sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ib. p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Ib. p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. SUENENS, *A Heroine* ... p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> Ib. p. 116.

« In Christ and led by His Spirit, we can offer through Mary to the Eternal Father the infinite merits and satisfactions of Christ to make reparation for our sins and for the sins of the world, to give thanks and glory to God... He makes us sharers in His life, so that, as He has taken our sins on Him, He may make us 'partners' in His merits. In Him we have everything — and what must that mean! ». <sup>14</sup>

« Christ's example: hidden life in obedience to Mary, doing the Father's will. Letting Jesus live again in me His life for the Father... United with Him in love for the Father, with Mary loving Jesus in me... Holiness our aim. 'Perfect as our Father'. Our holiness lies in keeping His life in us, in increasing it by ever closer union with Him Who is its source ». <sup>15</sup>

Edel lived united with Christ, especially in the Eucharist and in her ever more intimate participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Friends of her youthful days recall her Eucharistic fervour, her interminable visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and her custom of assisting at as many Masses as possible on Sundays. <sup>16</sup> Her resolutions during the years of her apostolate in Africa will always be the same: « Always as many Masses as possible... ». « More in His company in the Blessed Sacrament... ». <sup>17</sup>

This remarkable liturgical-Eucharistic note of her spirituality reveals itself continually in her notes:

« Without the Eucharist, what a desolation life would be! Thank the Trinity over and over again for this Gift. Keep Our Lord company in the Blessed Sacrament.. Our faith tells us He is in the Eucharist; let us seek Him there. If we knew we could find Him anywhere on earth we would do our utmost to go there. We can find Him, at every free moment, on the Altar. Be with Him there. Better than all books! ». <sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere, she writes: « At Mass I united myself to the victim Christ, through Mary's hands, for the glory of the Trinity, in thanksgiving for everything, and on behalf of souls. At Mass always to have the special intention of offering and hearing it on behalf of those souls who cannot hear it themselves by reason of sickness, distance, work or war. Place this intention in Mary's hands ». <sup>19</sup>

By means of her enlightened piety, Edel was able to abide in the « heart » of the Church, the Eucharist, and in the intimacy of the Mass to live the redeeming reality of Christ and His members.

Christ works through His Spirit, the Sanctifier and soul of the

<sup>14</sup> *Ib.* p. 246.

<sup>15</sup> *Ib.* p. 247. The quotations could be multiplied. Cf. especially all Chapter XXIII of the biography by SUENENS.

<sup>16</sup> *Ib.* p. 17; cfr. also pp. 66-67.

<sup>17</sup> *Ib.* pp. 175, 246.

<sup>18</sup> *Ib.* pp. 192-193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ib.* p. 250.



Church. Edel experienced His sanctifying action within her, moving her to dedicate herself for souls :

« Our thoughts and wishes for sanctity, our thirst for love of God, are not our own, but the Holy Spirit's. Therefore, if He puts them in our mind, He must mean to teach us how to fulfil them... Led by the Spirit of Jesus, realise that of ourselves we cannot have a good thought. If our good desires come from the Holy Spirit, how boldly can we expect their fulfilment, by offering Christ's merits to His Father through Mary ». <sup>20</sup>

Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary: three realities operating harmoniously in the work of redemption. And that was how Edel lived united with them in her soul, as she consecrated herself to the apostolic service of her neighbour. For, according to the words of one of the best exponents of the spirituality of the Legion of Mary, apostolic action means the continuation of the Incarnation of Christ, conceived in souls « by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary ». <sup>21</sup>

### *Union with Mary*

Edel Quinn was a profoundly Marian soul. From the days of her childhood, Our Blessed Lady occupied a special place in her life and apostolate. With the passing of the years, Mary became the fascinating ideal of her vocation, and the impelling inspiration of all her activities, even the most trivial.

Her devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God was solidly and securely founded on the doctrine of the Handbook and the teaching of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort. For Edel, Mary was no « monolith », but the Woman whom she loved to contemplate in the light of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, as « the dwelling of the Blessed Trinity », as the Mediatrix and Mother who conceives and forms Christ in the hearts of the faithful. The quotations we transcribe below present Our Blessed Lady as inseparably united with Christ in the life of Edel: no prayer to Our Lord that is not referred to His Mother; no glance at Mary that does not terminate in Christ. The quotations, chosen at random, reveal how balanced but ardent her Marian devotion was:

« Let us clothe ourselves with Christ. Ask Mary Mediatrix to pour His Divine Life into our souls, so that it may be He Who lives and no longer we... We give our acts to Mary, then she takes such of them as have spiritual value and uses them to build up Christ in us. Be hers, in order to be all the more His ». <sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ib. pp. 246-247.

<sup>21</sup> This idea recurs frequently in Cardinal Suenens's commentary on the promise made by Legionaries: *Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SUENENS, *A Heroine ...* p. 248.

« Mary loves Jesus in me, caresses and compassionates Him for all His wounds. But, above all, she speaks her gratitude for the Eucharist, and gives thanks to the Eternal Father for that Gift... In dryness be satisfied just to be with Him; Mary will love and adore... », <sup>23</sup>

« Realise that Mary loves us because we are Christ's legacy to Her. Let us give ourselves completely to Her, to be made all His, to be consumed unceasingly. Let us try to give utterly, in every possible way, without counting the cost, to be spent for Christ. As Jesus and with Him, to love Mary. Mary in me will love Her Son ». <sup>24</sup> Such was Edel's devotion to Our Blessed Lady: imitation, confidence and constant union as the source of her apostolic undertakings.

From her intimate union with Christ through Mary sprang Edel's legionary apostolate as a supernatural service. Her own words testify to this:

« Act as Jesus and Mary would act towards other people. Remember that these others are the temples of God... Adopt the point of view of Mary, her patience, her understanding love which accepts our least effort, however imperfect it may be... We will love our neighbour if in each one we see Christ... Restrain the tongue; employ it as you think Mary would have used her speech ». <sup>25</sup>

### *Lay Apostle and Moulder of Apostles*

In the Church Edel Quinn is a lay apostle. It is not so much her spirituality that characterizes her as her apostolic activity. However, it was her spiritual life and her union with Christ in His Mystical Body that rendered her apostolate so genuinely fruitful. From her prayer sprang the ardour of her dedication, which truly made of her « a heroine of the apostolate ».

Although her activity is bound up with a particular organization, namely, the Legion of Mary, the forcefulness of her witness and example is valid for all, because founded on the fundamental christian virtues.

### *Lay Apostle*

Our young legionary was adorned with the qualities and supernatural virtues that go to make great apostles. They were the gifts from on high that constituted her vocation. Edel put all those treasures of nature and grace at the complete disposal of the Church.

From girlhood, she had trained herself interiorly in the practice of virtue, to heroism in small things and to the scrupulous ful-

<sup>23</sup> *Ib.* p. 192.

<sup>24</sup> *Ib.* p. 270.

<sup>25</sup> *Ib.* p. 251.

filment of the duties of her state. By means of a continual and determined interior discipline, she succeeded in overcoming her timidity, denying her capricious whims and arriving at that contempt and forgetfulness of self which constitute the true following of Christ.

The testimony of her friends and the picture she unconsciously gives us of herself through her letters, reveal an Edel who is jovial and cheerful, an Edel with a broad mind and a big heart. Her presence communicated enthusiasm, her tenacity overcame all difficulties and her patience was truly a providential endowment in coping with missionary problems. Her capacity for work was unbelievable; this is confirmed by the weight of her correspondence and by her vast missionary programmes. She demanded precision and exactness from herself. When tuberculosis became the one unsurmountable obstacle to her activity, she transformed her malady into a life of interior fortitude and apostolic reparation.

Edel Quinn was conscious of her mission and she fulfilled it with diligence; she never wasted time and performed each action with great care. The following resolutions, mottos of her apostolate, reveal the firmness of her character :

« Avoid everything half-done... ».<sup>26</sup>

« Work for the day. The saints never lost time. Live for the day. Life is made up of days. Why lose a moment on the way during a brief journey? Our Eternity is built on time. Never waste time. If one has given all to Jesus and Mary, one has no right to waste time ».<sup>27</sup>

« Try to live as Envoy and Praetorian to the fullest ».<sup>28</sup>

Her preoccupation to be faithful to duty led her almost to excess in neglecting her health; and what for her was a far greater sacrifice, she readily abandoned the sweetness of contemplation when her conscience called her to activity.<sup>29</sup>

Edel put her uncommon natural endowments at the service of those supernatural virtues which characterize the true christian apostle and legionary.

Her faith: that plenitude of faith in Christ and of trust in Our Blessed Lady, for which she asked daily in the closing prayer of the « Catena », formed the secret of her unwearying activity. Those who had the privilege of living with her testify to the supernatural instinct which guided her, and the atmosphere of faith in which she lived. Cardinal Suenens, her biographer, sees in Edel's faith her message to the apostle of today.<sup>30</sup> Nothing but this « courageous

<sup>26</sup> *Ib.* p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> *Ib.* p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> *Ib.* p. 243.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. for example the following phrase from her notes, which reveals her attitude towards work and contemplation: « Our duty to work when we would sometimes rather be with Him ». *Ib.* p. 209

<sup>30</sup> Cf. all Chapter XXV: « The message of a life ». *Ib.* pp. 265-271.

faith, which inspires us to undertake and carry out great things for God », <sup>31</sup> explains her decision to set out for distant Africa, her hope of reaching even the Far East and her constant and exhausting activity. She was deeply moved by the news of the missionary expansion of the Legion in Asia. She felt united with all who from afar helped her by their prayers and sacrifices. Her own apostolic prayer was that of the Our Father: « Thy Kingdom come! ».

Deep faith was united with supernatural obedience. Edel was always conscious of her mission as « Envoy », and as such she fulfilled perfectly the principal duties of every Legionary, — fidelity to the directive norms of the Handbook, and obedience to the orders of her Superiors in Dublin — « head-quarters », as she graciously styled them. Instead of yielding to the easy temptation of a compromise, she held out courageously against a veritable avalanche of objections on the part of certain missionaries who wanted to « adapt » the Handbook. Her action was providential and won success for the Legion in Africa. If she was unrelenting where principles were concerned, she also knew how to ask for advice and solve particular problems, thereby prudently anticipating solutions which Frank Duff from Dublin afterwards accepted without hesitation.

Edel's life could not be lacking in what sets the seal to the mission of all great apostles, namely, the cross. Her ill health was a daily trial and, although most probably she did not worry excessively about misunderstandings, she did feel alone at times, and the defection of some legionaries caused her keen pain.

Such is the apostolic figure of Edel, in its broad outlines, with its qualities and most outstanding virtues. Her work consisted in the setting up of hundreds of Praesidiiums in Kenya, Uganda, Zanzibar, Malawi, Tanganika and the island of Mauritius; that meant the formation of thousands of legionaries for the apostolate of catechization and evangelization, the visiting of the sick, cultural instruction, the validation of marriages, etc. Her mission was that of a « pioneer » of the lay apostolate. To use her own words, she had « to open up the way », train and organize. Above all, she had to *train* and that remains her greatest title to glory.

#### *Moulder of Apostles*

Edel was a born leader. She was always esteemed and looked up to by her girl friends, who recall her skill in organizing tennis teams and operettas. Frank Duff was quick to detect her extraordinary qualities and characterized her as « a leader among leaders ». <sup>32</sup> In the ranks of the Legion she was speedily given the offices of President and Envoy.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. closing prayer of the « Catena »: *The Official Handbook ...* p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. F. DUFF, o. c. p. 3.

Her principal commission was that of « leader », which meant much hard work in the organizing of groups of militant laity in missionary countries, the instilling of an apostolic consciousness in newly-converted christians and the teaching by word and example that women too have to make an active contribution in the spreading of the Gospel.

It was no easy task to instil these truths into the minds of newcomers to the christian faith. The cheerful letters and amusing anecdotes sent to Dublin by Edel during these years afford us a glimpse of her colossal achievements, notwithstanding her declining health. There were grave problems to be unravelled and countless small difficulties to be overcome; she had to try and make herself understood in primitive dialects and she had to overcome the paralysing mentality which considered woman as something despicable with no apostolic consciousness. To a great extent the objections and obstacles came from fellow missionaries, who considered native christians as being incapable of doing Legionary work. But Edel was completely victorious, due, no doubt, to her deep faith and unlimited trust in Our Blessed Lady.

With an understanding which is characteristic of great « pioneers », Edel knew how to choose key people in every group; these she trained and gave responsibilities, independence and trust. Once a group was on its feet, she herself was quick to withdraw, so as to foster autonomy and initiative. However, by means of correspondence and visits, she kept in touch with the various groups, inspiring courage and solving their problems and difficulties. Under her competent direction, *Curias*, *Comitias* and *Senatus* were quickly organized in various countries and, at the time of her death, the way was clear in other parts.

Bishops and missionaries were simply amazed at the zeal of this Irish Legionary. They did not hesitate to confess that their own work when compared with hers was only half done, because they did not have her apostolic graces. Edel had the gift of perfecting things and she brought the newly-baptized themselves to participate in the apostolic yearnings and redeeming aspirations of the missionary Church.

« Moulder of apostles »: we believe that this was the distinctive achievement of Edel Quinn and « the great service she rendered the Church »; by training an apostolic laity in mission lands, she was reading « the signs of the times » and anticipating the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on the lay apostolate in missionary countries.<sup>35</sup>

In the light of all this, the following tribute rendered to her by Fran Duff does not seem too great:

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<sup>35</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree « Ad Gentes » on the missionary activity of the Church n. 21.

« If building for the Church is an important ingredient of sanctity, she possessed it. She now ranks with the great builders of the Church in Africa. Her organizing has become part of the fabric of the Church there, contributing as well to its future growth and spirit. The methods she introduced are now standard technique for mobilising the faithful and making them part of the active principle of the Church ». <sup>34</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The spirituality of Edel Quinn — her doctrine, life and example — are eminently suited to the needs of the Church of today. Her popularity is fast growing among the youth of Ireland, who see in her the « type » of the lay saint of modern times, because of her immersion in the humdrum affairs of life during her early years, her artistic and sporting attractions, her solid Christocentric and Marian piety, her burning love for the Church and her apostolate. Her life offers an answer to the apprehensions of our Catholic laity. In recent times, much has been written about the spirituality of the laity and all are anxiously looking forward to a model of that spirituality, emerging from the ranks of the laity themselves and receiving the Church's approval.

Seen in this light, the figure of Edel Quinn becomes heroic and daily acquires importance for the Church. Her natural endowments, placed at the service of souls, the sanctification of her social relations and of her work as typist and her sufferings offered as apostolic expiation are a living and convincing answer to the questions confronting the laity. Moreover, her wholehearted dedication to the work of the apostolate, the persuasive power of her words and example, the undaunted courage she showed on all occasions and, finally, the manner in which she harmonized activity with contemplation respond to the earnest yearnings of our lay apostles. Besides, the specific field of her activity, namely, the missions, the example she gives of adaptation, and the success that crowned her work among the native laity marks her out as a model for catechists especially, whom the Church today invites to the missionary apostolate.

All this confers on Edel Quinn the character of timeliness. She is truly an « envoy » from God to His Church in modern times. She belongs to the number of those great women who bring honour to the community of the people of God by the sanctity of their lives, and enrich it by the abundance of their charism.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. SUENENS, o. c. pp. 256-257.