

"Historic" Turning Point for U.S. Blue Army

by JOHN M. HAFFERT

Above: The Most Rev. Jerome J. Hastrich, Bishop of Gallup, N.M. and new National President, is shown addressing delegates to the 1980 National Council meeting this October 11 and 12.

The Blue Army actually began in the parlor of a Dorothean convent on the outskirts of the city of Porto, Portugal, in July, 1946. A Dorothean nun who, as a child of ten, had talked to Our Lady six times in the Cova da Iria 29 years before, formulated a "pledge" which covered the *essential* conditions of Our Lady for the conversion of Russia and world peace.

The next day this pledge was presented to the first Bishop of Fatima for evaluation. The Bishop said:

"You may promulgate this as coming from me."

Over 1 Million in Two Years

Within two years... thanks to the SCAPULAR Magazine published at that time in New York but now discontinued... over a million persons in the United States signed the pledge. And two years later the "March of Pledges" was expanding under the title of *The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima*... with those making the pledge also wearing some outward sign of blue to profess their commitment.

Mixed Growth

There was much concern during the first decade of the Blue Army with the "Secret of 1960." Nuclear war might have been part of the secret, and the Blue Army felt a need to work night

and day to extend the "March of Pledges" across the world.

During this decade the Blue Army was encouraged by the first Bishop of Fatima who saw it as becoming the major world response to the Message of Fatima. It soon spread to most countries of the free world and an International Center was built behind the Basilica of Fatima where experts from many nations were invited to study the Fatima Message and to plan further development of this world Apostolate.

A "Minimum" of Organization

Little thought was given to "organization," although at the direction of the Bishop of Fatima a set of statutes was drawn up to govern the Apostolate (approved *ad experimentum* by the Holy See). But *anyone* who offered to promote the Message of Fatima was welcomed with open arms and encouraged.

It is remarkable that this led to so few abuses and failures... like that of Francis Schuckardt, an American Blue Army crusader who became disobedient, even left the Church, and set up a parallel apostolate which caused much confusion, especially in the Western United States.

Set Back in 1960

1960 came and went... and the secret to be "opened" that year was not made public. Some said that it probably had never existed. Many began to doubt the Message of Fatima itself. It was a dark time for the Apostolate.

Seven years later, at the order of the Pope a press conference concerning the secret was called in Rome (February 11, 1967). In the name of the Pope, the Cardinal who headed the important Curial committee formerly known as the "Holy Office," stated that the Pope had opened the secret in 1960, and had decided that it should not be made public but that what was important was *that part of the Message of Fatima already made known*.

"Most Urgent"

Some newsmen reported that the Cardinal had "denounced" the Blue Army for having emphasized the Secret. When the Cardinal learned of this His Eminence made a public statement denying the press allegation and praising the Blue Army for its great work. The Cardinal repeated that what was most urgent was *a worldwide response to the Message of Fatima*.

Not long before this, the highest member of the Roman Curia... the Dean of the College of Cardinals... had said:

"The Blue Army is a response to the Message of Fatima," and indicated it to be *one of the most important apostolates of our time*.

Affirmed by Pope

Four months after the press conference in Rome on the Secret mentioned above, *the Pope himself went to Fatima* (May 13, 1967), issuing the encyclical *Signum Magnum* (The Great Sign). On this occasion the Holy Father

The "1960 Secret" Changed

the Blue Army's Direction...

had at his side Sr. Mary of the Immaculate Heart, D.C., the same person who as a child of ten had spoken to Our Lady of Fatima and who at the age of thirty-nine had formulated the Blue Army Pledge. With a wide gesture, the Pope presented her to the crowd of more than a million... and by television to the world... as the messenger of Our Lady.

Organization Needed

Shortly after the Pope's visit to Fatima, the second Bishop of Fatima agreed to become active, *International President of the Blue Army*. His Excellency set out that same year on an around-the-world trip with the Pilgrim Virgin statue, calling everywhere for a development of the Blue Army as the world's principal response to the Fatima Message.

In his instruction to the International Council which elected him, the Bishop stressed the need for implementing the statutes of organization which had been drawn up by his predecessor, the first Bishop of Fatima.

"Number One" Deterrent

Meanwhile there had been further developments in the world which made the Message of Fatima more personal, more meaningful, more urgent to millions.

Our Lady had said that "Error will spread from an atheist Russia throughout the entire world, fomenting further wars... several entire nations will be annihilated." And by now the power of Communism had extended to more than one-third of the world's population and seemed to be advancing inexorably. And now, too, Satan... who seemed to "possess" the world-atheist movement powered from Russia... was turning against the Blue Army Apostolate with great force.

In the half-million copies of the voice of militant atheism, published in Russia, it was stated in October, 1967 (the very time that the Bishop of Fatima himself assumed the

presidency and active international direction of the Apostolate) that the Blue Army was... after Hitler and the Cold War... the *number one deterrent to the success of the world atheist revolution*.

Satan's Efforts Felt

The opposition which began to be heard against this simple apostolate of holiness, and the rumors which began to circulate concerning its leaders, could hardly be explained in any natural way. Divisions arose, "good" persons began to speak ill of others in the same Apostolate, Bishops in many parts of the world began to have a "feeling" that Blue Army members were extremists. In some instances Church defectors who claimed to be apostles of the Fatima Message (like the Schuckardt group) were confused with the Blue Army itself.

In some countries (as in Italy and India) it became necessary to use an alternate name (*World Apostolate of Our Lady of Fatima*) because the very name of the Blue Army had become so besmirched.

1980 Triumph!

In Washington, N.J., U.S.A., from where the Blue Army began as a national organization in 1950 and then spread throughout the world, a Shrine has been built in honor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Here, on October 11 through 13, 1980, leaders of the Blue Army of recognized divisions of the Apostolate in ninety different dioceses met in an historic meeting and decided to take charge of the running of the organization... a decision which may prove to be a turning point for the Apostolate not only in America but possibly in the world.

One year before, under very difficult circumstances, the leaders of the Blue Army of the United States had met to consider their own organization. For almost thirty years they had been getting "direc-

tions" from headquarters without voice, without national elections, without adequate statutory organization. Now the Apostolate had officially recognized divisions in more than half the dioceses of the United States. So, on October 13, 1979, they *elected* national officers for one year and decided they would return in 1980 to decide again on officers and to adopt a formal constitution to define and to govern the Apostolate in the future.

Elections Were Protested

The Most Rev. Jerome J. Hastrich, D.D., Bishop of Gallup, N.M. and Founder and President of the Queen of the Americas Guild, had consented in 1979 to be Vice President of the Blue Army in the U.S. for one year, and His Excellency presided at the historic 1980 meeting.

Those who had protested the validity of the 1979 elections were there. They now wanted to prevent elections in 1980. But the elections were held, and the constitution was adopted.

To those on the "inside" who knew the whole thirty-year history of the Apostolate, the results of this 1980 U.S. Blue Army meeting *seemed little short of a miracle*.

Former Intl. President Pleased

The second Bishop of Fatima, who became International President of the Blue Army in 1967 a few months after the Pope's Fatima pilgrimage, saw in this *great hope for the Apostolate throughout the world*. In joyful appreciation, the Bishop... now retired... wrote to Bishop Hastrich to congratulate and to thank him for having accepted a leadership position in the Blue Army in 1979.

In order to placate those who had opposed these elections, the national Blue Army convention of 1980

"After Hitler and the Cold War, the Blue Army is the Number One Deterrent to the success of the World Atheist Revolution..."

— (Science and Religion, October 1967 issue)

had been asked merely to approve the officers of the previous year for one more year. *But the convention insisted on open nominations and valid elections.*

Only two changes were made:

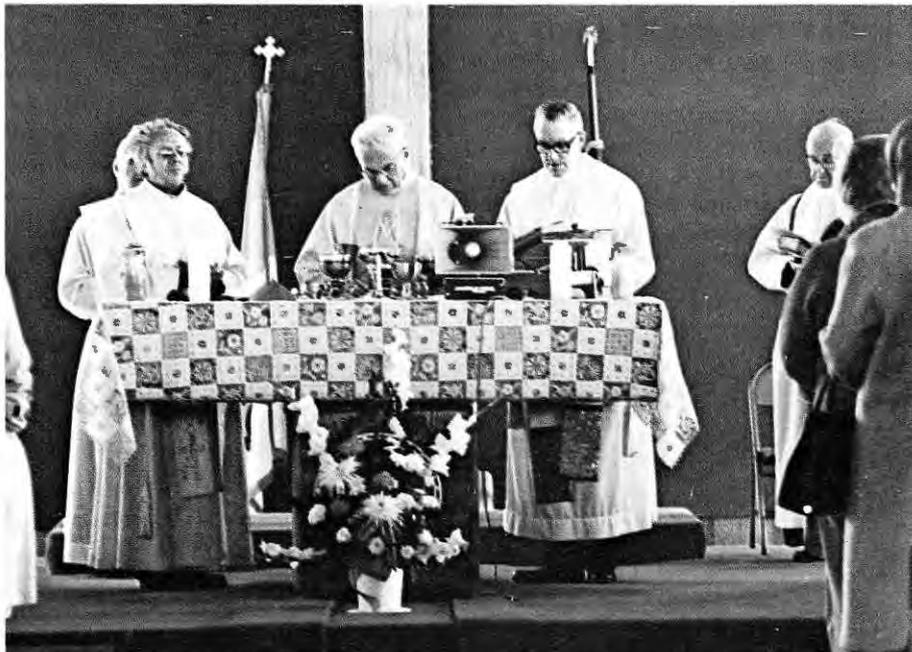
Bishop Hastrich was elected President and the Most Rev. Nicholas T. Elko, D.D., Auxiliary of Cincinnati, was elected Vice President. A telephone call for acceptance was made to Archbishop Elko.

Having known the importance of the Apostolate for almost a quarter of a century, the Archbishop asked only one question: "Would my service be useful?" And when told that the committee felt he was not only the right person but that his acceptance would be "another rose among the many you have already placed in Our Lady's crown," the Archbishop did not hesitate to accept.

Thus a new era has dawned for this Apostolate to which is attached the great promise of Our Lady's Triumph:

The LEADERS of the movement ...in dioceses where they have spent themselves (often for years) to cause the Message of Fatima to be

Below: Some of the spiritual directors who attended the 1980 National Council meeting. Left to right are Fr. Matthew Strumski of Rhode Island, Bishop Hastrich, Fr. Otto Pisoni of Erie, Pa. diocese and Fr. Thomas Gildea, C.S.S.R. of New York.



heard and lived... are NOW IN CHARGE OF IT, with a constitution to guide their growth and their work.

And Satan has new cause to fear this Army of the Queen who promised at Fatima the conversion of Russia and "an era of peace to mankind."

Above: Bishop Constantino Luna speaking at ceremonies at Shrine of October 13. In addressing delegates during National Council meeting, His Excellency spoke on the importance of Blue Army Cells, and made the comments printed below.

Nothing could be more important to us in today's world than the Blue Army Cell movement.

Now that so many of us have made the commitment to wear the Scapular, pray the Rosary, and live our Morning Offering, we need to have special groups to imitate the children of Fatima and offer up whatever God desires to send us in a spirit of reparation for sin and for the conversion of sinners.

Need Mutual Support

By all means we need the support of one another, and when we meet together in our little "cells"—even if we be two or three—there is enormous spiritual strength just in our meeting. Did not Our Lord say, where two or three of us meet together, He was in our midst?

Our Model

Our Lady Herself gave the example. At Fatima She chose three children whose spiritual strength grew each day in their own personal meetings, in their own recitation of the Rosary together, and in their recalling the things that She said to them! Oh, how inspiring it is to see in the Memoirs of Lucia how the children would support each other in making their little sacrifices!

I like to think of the meeting of the Blue Army Cells as "With Mary, we are meeting Christ."