

**Alphonse Bossard, s.m.m.**

**TO FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST**

**WITH MARY**

**according to the teaching of**

**St. Louis Marie de Montfort**

“To Follow Jesus Christ with Mary”

Translated from the French of the 2nd edition by  
Paul R. Allerton, s.m.m.

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## FOREWORD

In the life and missionary activity of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort, **associations** for the faithful played a role of the highest importance. The very varied groupings of people that he established in his travels, were a means of prolonging his apostolic action, and his dream was to see the “special devotion” of the Holy Slavery of Jesus in Mary (TD 244) raised to the dignity of a “confraternity” (TD 227), so as to perpetuate this devotion which he had taught with so much fruit in public and in private (TD 110), and whose ultimate end is to **bring about in the world the reign of Jesus Christ, eternal and incarnate Wisdom**. This dream was to become a reality. For more than a century now, numerous Christians from all around the world have been consecrating themselves to Jesus through Mary according to St. Louis Marie’s formula and asking to be inscribed in the Archconfraternity or Confraternity of Mary Queen of All Hearts, thus uniting themselves in various ways with the specific aim of the Company of Mary. These are the “**Montfortian Associates**” in the strict sense.

A new category of persons is approaching us today, often attracted by our work rather than our spirituality. Conscious of the encouragement given to the role of the lay-person in the Church, they also want to collaborate in the specific apostolate of the Company of Mary. We have to learn how to welcome them and how to give them their rightful place, without forgetting those who come to us to receive a training in Montfortian spirituality, even if they do not express a desire to join in the concrete pursuit of our apostolate.

In the spirit of our ecclesial mission, we owe it to ourselves to open wide our doors and our hearts to all of these, to receive them in a brotherly spirit, just as our Constitutions invite us to do: “In order that both of these (*laity and Montfort Missionaries*) may best respond to the demands of their apostolic vocation, when the case arises they (*lay-people*) may be ‘**associates**’ of the Company of Mary, through various structures set up to receive and support them according to the inspiration of Montfort and the many ways which he himself opened” (C no. 61). The Montfortian message is for them: “[...] Montfort Missionaries will strive to present, with appropriate means, the spirituality of their Founder to those whom it might interest” (C no. 60).

But what is to be presented to them, and how is it to be done? This is the serious question which recent General Chapters and meetings of the Extraordinary General Council have tackled and tried to fathom. Our associations of “Mary Queen of All Hearts” were established with the aim of allowing lay-people and priests to associate themselves with both our spirituality and our mission. How are we to give them a new vitality, to stimulate them to become effectively a complementary adjunct of the Company of Mary? Since the consecration to Jesus through Mary according to the Montfortian formula is a necessary condition for belonging to our associations, a solid and serious preparation seems to be indispensable if candidates are to be able to really know the nature of this consecration and the obligations which it entails. Merely being entered in the register is not enough.

With the aim of supplying those in charge of the Associates and our own Formation personnel with a tool to help them in their delicate task, Fr. Alphonse Bossard was asked to draw up a text for their use. In thanking Fr. Bossard for the magnificent work he has done, I am happy to introduce this “manual” which might well serve as the foundation for the task of accompanying those who wish to live by the Montfortian spirituality and so participate in our mission in the Church.

Rome, 8 June 1993  
Feast of Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom

*Gerard Lemire, smm*  
Superior General

# Introduction

## **“A witness and teacher”: Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort**

31 January 1673 to 28 April 1716: merely 43 years and three months of life on this earth! When we think of all “Father de Montfort” did in so short a time and all he has left us, we have reason to be dumbfounded. His priestly ministry covered barely 16 years, since he was ordained priest on 5 June 1700. His missionary activity led him into nearly 200 parishes; he found time to look after the poor, to busy himself with his foundations, to make frequent retreats; he covered thousands of kilometres on foot... When did he find leisure enough to write? For, as well as the example he has left us by his life, we find his heritage today in various writings, certain of which can be counted among the great works of spiritual literature and yet retain a surprising relevance. So much so that many today take him for their guide, an example being Pope John Paul II, who has written: “*In this regard (he was speaking of the impact on Marian spirituality and devotion of the experience of various people and communities), I would like to recall, among the many witnesses and teachers of this spirituality, the figure of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, who proposes consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments*”<sup>1</sup>.

Who then is this man? What has he to say to us today? To find out, after tracing briefly the path he took, we will look at the principal themes of his spiritual way.

# I. AN APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

## a) Family background

Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort was born in Montfort-sur-Meu (then called Montfort-la-Cane), a small village about twenty kilometres from Rennes in Brittany. Our saint's family background is well known. His father, an advocate of small means but not lacking in ambition, struggled with the financial cares to which his large family was no stranger: eighteen children, of whom seven or eight died young. This hardly contributed to a softening of a character which was quite difficult.

But we must not paint too dark a picture: Jean-Baptiste Grignion was a convinced Christian, with a determination to pass on to his children his own faith and to give them a solid education in both the humanities and religion. Certainly he was helped in this by his wife, Jeanne Robert, herself the sister of three priests. Three of their own sons went on to the priesthood, and two of their daughters became religious.

## b) Secondary studies in Rennes (1685-1692) and the Seminary in Paris (1692-1700)

In 1685, Louis Marie entered the College of St. Thomas Beckett, conducted by the Jesuit Fathers in Rennes. He made his mark by his seriousness in studies, but also by his piety, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and, even at this young age, his love for the poor.

Louis Marie heard the call to the priesthood. In the Autumn of 1692, he left for Paris to do his "major seminary" training, under the guidance of the Sulpicians. He was to gain much. Even if he opted more for "*the science of the saints*" than for that of "*the savants*", that does not mean he did not acquire a solid theological formation (to which his principal writings would witness), which contributed to the enrichment of his spiritual life, especially in things to do with his Marian piety. He discovered the devotion known as "*The Holy Slavery of the Mother of God*"; not content with making it his own, he became its zealous promoter among his fellow students. The criticisms made of him at that time led him to amass an abundant documentation of a Marian nature and to deepen the theological foundations of this "*slavery*", so much so that he endowed it with new dimensions, thanks to a more explicit and more demanding reference to Christ. This Christological re-centring which he achieved at that time, arising from a



grasp in depth of the mystery of the Incarnation, gave him the ability to integrate his exceptional Marian piety into the heart of his Christian life and to pursue it to its ultimate practical consequences.

With Monsieur Leschassier, who became his spiritual director in 1696, things were not always easy. Louis Marie's behaviour, while being marked by a very real will to be obedient, was none the less shocking in the eyes of his director. The latter would much rather see him cast in the normal mould than set himself apart by a wayward "singularity" and manifestations of fervour so unusual as to raise questions. No doubt we must attribute some of this to a wholeness of character in Montfort, little given to half-measures. But the source of the conflict was deeper than this: it was the opposition between an understanding of the spiritual life which was rather "*ascetical*", in the tradition of M. Tronson, where the observance of the common rule, written or unwritten, took pride of place; and a more "*mystical*" way, more unpredictable, after the manner of M. Olier. The question arose for M. Leschassier whether his directee was really led by a "*good spirit*", and he was unable to give an answer. Whence arose the trials which he imposed and had imposed on Montfort. In the end, he refused to continue giving him advice, and in 1703, a final break took place. In fact (though the truth is easier to discover in the light of his entire life's journey than just in its beginnings) it was truly the Holy Spirit who was at work in him, shaping the saint and the apostle that he was to become, even by means of the trials, difficulties and rejections that he had to meet with.

### **c) First steps in ministry**

After his ordination on 5 June 1700, Montfort went to Nantes, where he hoped to be able to train himself for a ministry of "parish missions" in the community of M. Lévêque. He was disappointed in this hope, but, already, a dream haunted him: to see the birth of "*a small and poor band of good priests to do this work under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin*" (Letter to M. Leschassier, dated 6 December 1700).

Various circumstances, in which he saw the hand of God, led him to Poitiers. Passing through the *Hôpital Général*, he exerted a special attraction on the poor inmates who, even before they had heard him speak, recognised in him someone who would be able to understand and love them. They claimed him as their chaplain. Montfort accepted, but for a reason which it is important to notice: "*The only thing that would make me want to go to the poorhouse at all would be the hope of being able to extend my work later into the town and the countryside and so be able to help more people. When I am teaching catechism to the poor in town and country, I am in my*

*element*” (Letter 9, dated 16 September 1701, addressed to M. Leschassier). His love for the poor is not in doubt: it was and would remain to the end one of his special characteristics, and he would be unstinting of his time and his energy to help them, materially as well as spiritually. But the “*mission*” remained his primary objective, and it was through this that he saw himself serving the poor, not through shutting himself up in a poor-house.

Nevertheless, he did accept the post of chaplain. His devotedness and his organisational sense worked marvels, but also, after some time, aroused jealousy. So much so that he had to leave in Spring 1703. But he had met Marie-Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet, who were later to become the first two Daughters of Wisdom...

He arrived in Paris, where he began working in the Salpêtrière Hospital. But he found himself dismissed after a few months. There he was, on the pavement, rejected by his old masters at Saint-Sulpice, finding refuge in a poor hovel under a staircase in the Rue du Pot de Fer. But he had met his old friend, Claude Poullart des Places, who had founded the Holy Spirit Seminary, and who promised to supply him later with subjects for the Company of missionaries of which he never ceased to dream. This was also for him a time of intense spiritual searching, driven by his passionate seeking for Wisdom, that is for Jesus, eternal and incarnate Wisdom. It was no doubt at this time, around 1703, that he wrote “*The Love of Eternal Wisdom*”, a work less well-known than the “*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*”, but one which nevertheless is of great importance.

At the end of 1703, we find him among the hermits of Mont-Valérien, where he had been called to re-establish order in a community in difficulties, a proof that some at least had confidence in him.

In March 1704, we find him once again in the Hospital in Poitiers, for “his” poor people had reclaimed him. But he was unable to stay there very long, his reforming actions having aroused further opposition of a violent nature, so much so that, after about a year, he judged it wiser to leave.

So there he was, free at last to give himself to mission work, with the consent of the Bishop of Poitiers, Mgr. de la Poype. So we find him in the working-class suburb of Montbernage, where he left a lasting memorial, then in the parishes of Saint-Savin and the Calvary. But those who opposed him had not laid down their arms. Certain people, going far beyond the instructions of the missionary who wanted to make a bonfire of the bad books brought in by the people, without his knowledge had made a grotesque spectacle featuring the devil. Warned of this by some wagging tongues, M. de Villeroi, the Vicar General, who had no great love for the missionary, came along to witness the masquerade. Going into the Calvary Church where

Montfort was preaching, he interrupted the preacher and publicly subjected him to a violent storm of abuse. Mgr. de la Poype was absent at that moment, but, on his return, being informed of the incident in a very tendentious way by M. de Villeroi, he gave in to the pressure exerted by his influential Vicar General and chased the saint from his diocese. So Montfort left; but he was not alone: he had found, in the person of Mathurin Rangeard, a companion who would never leave him again, and who has passed into history under the name of Brother Mathurin.

#### **d) Journey to Rome and confirmation in his vocation as missionary in France**

The first few years of Montfort's ministry give the impression of saw-teeth, since he did not succeed in establishing himself or integrating himself sufficiently to be accepted in a lasting way. That at least is what some might be tempted to think. Yet we must not jump to conclusions too quickly. While recognising that, at certain times, he may have been lacking in flexibility, and that he needed time to soften certain rough traits in his character; yet we must not forget that the choices he made were demanded by fidelity to the Gospel, and that what seemed to be intransigence in him, was quite simply a refusal to compromise with "*the spirit of the world*" in opposition to that of Jesus Christ. Besides, these difficult years afforded him a rich human and spiritual experience. They were the occasion for encounters of which only the future would reveal the significance for his foundations: we only need to recall Marie- Louise Trichet, Catherine Brunet and Brother Mathurin. And above all, these years show the deep unity of his spiritual personality and his fidelity to his basic concept of apostolic life. Montfort shows no signs of instability on a psychological level; on the contrary, he was able to take advantage of everything in his search, through events and circumstances, for what the Lord wanted of him.

After Mgr. de la Poype's decision to chase him from the diocese, he found himself faced with the question: where now? He had already seen so many doors closed to him. Was his "vocation" then to leave for far-off countries awaiting evangelisation, as he had dreamed at the beginning of his priestly life? But, then, what was to become of the projects he had formed, thinking them to be inspired by God?

To gain some light on this, Montfort came up with the rather foolish idea of going to ask the Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, what he should do. So it was that he set out on his journey to Rome. Clement XI received him in audience, about 6 June 1706, and having listened to him, said: "*You have, Monsieur, a wide enough field in France to exercise your zeal: do not go*

*elsewhere, and work always with a perfect submission to the Bishops in the dioceses where you are called. In this way, God will bless your work”<sup>2</sup>. And the Pope gave him the title of “apostolic missionary”.*

**e) 1706-1710: With M. Leuduger; at the hermitage of St. Lazare; in the Nantes area**

Thus confirmed in his vocation as a missionary in France, the saint set off to meet with Brother Mathurin, who had patiently awaited his return at Ligugé, near Poitiers. Then, off he went with this faithful companion towards his native Brittany. Towards the end of 1706, he took part in the great mission in Dinan, before joining the missionary team led by M. Leuduger.

Heir to Father Maunoir, a disciple and follower of Father Huby, Dom Leuduger continued the great tradition of the “Breton mission”; his reputation was great, as was his influence. A score of priests worked with him on a permanent basis, and others joined him occasionally as the need arose. The collaboration between this experienced missionary and the new recruit was to be very enriching from a number of points of view for the latter, but it was not to last very long. In August 1707, a break-up occurred. The reason given was that Montfort had taken up a collection with a view to offering Masses for the souls in Purgatory, while the rule forbade the missionaries, who were assured of their stipends, to ask for money. It is hard to imagine St. Louis Marie lacking in poverty! On the contrary, when he was able to please himself, he would refuse what were called “*funded*” missions, that is, missions in which all expenses were taken care of in advance, so as to live quite simply “*in dependence on the people*”. What we have here then is a pretext for getting rid of someone who was something of a burden and whose success might have put one or other of his companions in the shade. Perhaps, also, M. Leuduger was simply giving in to pressure from those around him, since, a few years later, he would ask Montfort to come back to him with a view to succeeding him.

So the missionary took to the road once more. After a brief stop in his home-town, he stayed for a while at the hermitage of St. Lazare, while at the same time going out to the neighbouring places where he was invited to preach. Faced, however, with the limitations which the local Bishop of this place, too, wished to impose on him, he preferred to move away, about the middle of 1708, in the direction of the diocese of Nantes, where he was to carry on giving missions until September 1710. That year, the grandiose project for the Calvary at Pontchâteau was to demonstrate the hold he had over the crowds and to give expression to the major themes of his life and preaching: the Cross, as a sign of the love of God for us which Christ came

to reveal, Mary, present in the life of her Son and in ours, with the mysteries of the Rosary. But once again envy and spite were to dog his footsteps: the Calvary, by order of the king, Louis XIV, was to be pulled down, and Mgr. de Bauvau was soon to indicate to the missionary that he was withdrawing his faculties for hearing confessions and preaching in his diocese.

#### **f) 1711-1716: The last period, in the dioceses of Luçon and La Rochelle**

Supported unreservedly by Mgr. de Lescure, the Bishop of Luçon, and even more by Mgr. de Champflour, Bishop of La Rochelle, Montfort finally found the field in which his apostolic zeal would be able to be deployed with full freedom. He who had so much wanted to work “*with a perfect submission to the Bishops*” (as demanded by Clement XI, but also by his own personal conviction, for he had a profound sense of the Church), was now able to do so in tranquillity of spirit. Since we cannot hope to go into all the details of his travels, let us content ourselves with the salient points of this period.

It was no doubt around 1713 that he took the time to write the little book known as “*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*”, which, after its discovery in 1842, made its author known throughout the world. With Mgr. de Champflour, he busied himself with the education of children. To this end, he worked to renew an institution already in existence but which no longer met the needs of those for whom it was intended, by setting up “*charitable schools*”, that is, free schools. One school for boys was organised. For the girls’ schools, he got Marie-Louise Trichet and Catherine Brunet to come from Poitiers; they had been waiting there for ten years for the fulfilment of the promise he had made them to found with them the “*Daughters of Wisdom*”. The time was now ripe.

There remained one project which was particularly close to his heart: the “*small and poor band of good priests*” to preach missions “*under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin*”, of which he had spoken to M. Leschassier as early as 1700. This project had matured, and Montfort was ready to draw up the “*Rules of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary*”, the manuscript of which seems to date from the Spring of 1713. We also possess the “*Burning Prayer*” (Prayer for Missionaries), in which the saint asks the three Persons of the Trinity for this Company of Mary. At that time, the only ones with him in a stable manner were a few “*Brothers*”, among whom those who had been with him the longest, Mathurin and Jean, had not wanted to commit themselves by vows. Though he had had, and still had, the collaboration of priests, he had been unable up to that point to get

any of them to join him on a definitive basis. But the faith and hope which, ten years earlier, had inspired his passionate search for Wisdom, had lost none of their strength. With the same vehemence and assurance, he now begged God for apostles after his own heart. He also took action: in August 1713, he went to Paris to recall to the successors of his old friend Claude Poullart des Places his promise to supply him with missionaries. He was warmly received, and his effort was not in vain: several of the first Fathers of the Company of Mary would come from the Holy Spirit Seminary. But that was to be after the death of the founder.

We must look at the journey he made to Rouen in June 1714, to visit Canon Blain. To what end? Did he hope to convince his friend to join him in his mission work? It is possible. In any case, some very precious thoughts of Montfort, which throw light on important aspects of his spiritual life, have been passed on to us by M. Blain.<sup>3</sup>

When St Louis Marie died, on 28 April 1716, at the end of the mission in St-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, apart from the Brothers, two priests were with him: Adrien Vatel and René Mulot. From a human point of view, neither of them seemed to have the qualities required to continue his work. In addition, nothing tied them definitively to the missionary's small band. And yet they would take up the torch: Montfort's prayer had been answered.

Thanks to the Congregations he founded, thanks also to the memory he left behind in the hearts of many of those to whom he had preached, there was no risk of Father de Montfort's being forgotten. But his world-wide reputation only took off with the discovery of the manuscript of the "*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*" in 1842 and its immediate publication in 1843. Beatified in 1888, then canonised on 20 July 1947, his spiritual influence, both on many individuals and on various institutes and groups, has not lessened. It is true that it is above all the Marian aspect of his spirituality which is remembered. That is why it might be useful now to set forth the broad traits of his spiritual physiognomy before venturing on his Marian way.

## **II. A SPIRITUAL WAY**

### **a) How Montfort saw God**

"*God alone!*". This motto, which sounds like a battle cry, was the one Montfort made his own. It expresses both the absolute nature of God and the

exceptional radicalism of the option which brings about this saint's commitment to him. There is no doubt that he had a sense of the "grandeur" of the Almighty, enthroned infinitely far above all his creatures who, compared to him, are nothing. In that he shows himself to be a man of his time and also, let us not forget, a man of the Bible. But it is the revelation made by Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ which impregnates his vision of God and demands his attitude towards him. It is a question of a God who is Father, Son and Spirit, who loves man as only he *can* love him, and who stops at nothing to save him.

***"I have a Father in heaven who will never fail me"***

Very early on, Montfort reached an essential certitude which nourished his spiritual life very deeply: *he had a Father in heaven who loved him, a Father who took care of him, a Father who could not fail him.* This faith explains his attitude of simple confidence, a filial confidence in divine Providence which was unshakeable. According to the testimony of his friend Blain, it inspired the young man of 20 who, after giving away everything, walked with joyful steps along the road that brought him to Paris: *"From that time onwards, he abandoned himself entirely to Providence, surrendering himself to its care with such confidence and serenity that he gave the impression of feeling that he was the only human being that Providence had to look after. A purse full of gold or a cheque for ten thousand pounds to be cashed in Paris would not have made him feel more secure."*<sup>4</sup>

Is there any better way to express the degree to which Montfort, in faith, knew himself to be in the hands of his heavenly Father? The degree to which, also, the relationship he had with the Father was a personal one: *"he gave the impression of feeling that he was the only human being that Providence had to look after"?*

When the benefactor who was paying for his keep in the community of M. de la Barmondière, where he was welcomed on his arrival in Paris, ceased to do so, Louis Marie found himself in a more than precarious situation. This was his reaction, and the astonishment it aroused among his companions: *"Any other clerical student - he had been tonsured - would have been very much perplexed and worried. He kept his usual serenity although he was on the eve of being thrown on the streets. He expected this to happen any day, but he lost none of his recollection nor did he worry in the least... He was once asked in my presence: 'What would have become of you if M. de la Barmondière had turned you out?' As far as I remember he replied unconcernedly that he had not yet given it a thought and that God was his sole support."*<sup>5</sup>

A little later, on 16 September 1694, M. de la Barmondière died. Louis Marie was once more in the greatest uncertainty regarding his future. His calm and his confidence did not desert him, as is shown by these few lines he wrote to his uncle, the Abbé Alain Robert, on 20 September 1694: *“It was he who founded the seminary here and had the kindness to receive me for nothing. I do not know yet how things will go, whether I shall stay or leave, as his will has not yet been made known. Whatever happens I shall not be worried. I have a Father in heaven who will never fail me.”* (Letter 2, *God Alone*, pg. 3). We are not looking here at a theoretical discourse: very simply, one might almost say artlessly, Louis Marie describes his state of soul and indicates the source of his serenity, the certainty that he had *“a Father in heaven who will never fail me.”*

This attitude of Montfort, while still young, seems to be too “natural” and too deep within him for us to believe that it might be spontaneously produced. That is to say that it is rooted in his past, just like the conviction of faith from which it flows. On the foundation of this initial attitude, the discoveries that he would make afterwards and his progress in spiritual ways would allow him to express so much the better his filial relationship, shot through with confident tenderness, with the one he loved to call his *“good Father”*. Never, not even in the darkest hours, such as during his period of dereliction in 1703, or after the order to demolish the Calvary at Pontchâteau, do we find him leaving behind a serenity and a confidence which were the wonder of his contemporaries. The Father-God of St. Louis Marie is very much the Father-God of the Gospel, the God who loves us, as revealed by Jesus.

### ***Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ***

Here we come face to face with a spiritual intuition which undoubtedly characterises Montfort. We have already noted that, in the period 1701-1704, he leant towards *“the acquisition and possession of Wisdom,”* that is, of Christ.<sup>6</sup> This was also the moment when he wrote *“The Love of Eternal Wisdom”*. Whatever might be said of the authors he may have consulted, his principal source is the Bible, which he examines directly: *“It is the whole Wisdom thread that Montfort profits by. Which presupposes, in my opinion, a **study** of this theme or dossier. How did Montfort carry this out? I have no idea. But the results are there, too systematic for them to be merely the fruit of a spiritual intuition. Certainly, Montfort’s reflections are set in the context of prayer (LEW 1-2 and Letter 16), but he did not neglect the research work... His understanding has nothing of the naïve or fundamentalist about it: it represents a real **attempt to understand the whole body of Biblical texts.**”*<sup>7</sup>



For a long time considered a youthful work, even a minor one, eclipsed by the success of the *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, today we recognise *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* as having a value, a relevance and an originality which is incontestable.

Its *value*: as well as its character as a synthesis with regard to the Montfortian spiritual way, its being rooted in the Bible and the authenticity, recognised today, of its spiritual exegesis, makes it one of the essential writings of St. Louis Marie.

Its *relevance*: “We are witnessing a true rediscovery, and in certain cases a rehabilitation of the Wisdom writings of the Old testament, as we perceive better today the originality, richness and ‘modernity’ they possess. Consequently, the work of Montfort can only arouse a greater interest and know a better popularity among the Christian public, who are more and more seeking for a spirituality which is renewed and solid, and deeply rooted in the Bible.”<sup>8</sup>

Its *originality*: according to Fr. Gilbert, S.J., a well-known specialist in biblical wisdom literature, “It is truly surprising to see the influence of the Book of Wisdom on Montfort’s treatise. I do not know if there are any other spiritual writings of this importance which have based their doctrine, as Montfort has, on this little Greek book of the Old Testament... The case of Montfort, a spiritual exegete of the Book of Wisdom, is exceptional, especially if one realises that his treatise is still carried by a religious family which claims it for their own.”<sup>9</sup>

We can discover in *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* how Montfort sees Jesus, and, at the same time, the essentially and fundamentally Christological orientation of a spirituality which has as its centre the mystery of the Incarnation oriented towards Redemption. In fact, the God in whom Montfort is interested is not the God of the “philosophers and savants” (even though he takes great pains not to neglect anything that study might bring him for the enrichment of his relationship with God); it is the God who is at the origin of our history, the God who intervenes in this history in a definitive manner in Jesus Christ, to lead it through him towards its fulfilment and so to bring to reality the plan of his love over us and for us.

In chapter 2 of LEW, Montfort wants to speak of “*The Origin and Excellence of Eternal Wisdom*”. With the help of texts from the Old and New Testaments, he demonstrates the marvellous beauty of Wisdom, which explains why “God the Father was well pleased with (her<sup>10</sup>) throughout time and eternity” (no. 19); this beauty is manifested to the Apostles at the Transfiguration. For Montfort - as for true Christian faith - the Incarnate

Word does not cease to be eternal Wisdom, and he spontaneously applies to Jesus what the Old Testament had to say of Wisdom.

The saint immediately moves on to *the relationship* which this Wisdom has with men and what she wishes to do in them: “*This is how divine Wisdom herself describes in the twenty-fourth chapter of Ecclesiasticus the effects of her activity in souls.*” (no. 20)

In chapter 3, the topic is *The Marvellous Power of Divine Wisdom Shown in the Creation of the World and Man*. With the help of the Bible, Montfort recounts the “history” of Wisdom with us. His concern is first of all with the care she takes of her creation: “*Solomon says that eternal Wisdom is the mother and maker of all things. Notice that Solomon does not call her simply the maker of the universe but also its mother because the maker does not love and care for the work of his hands like a mother does for her child*” (no. 31).

This attention which Wisdom, the creator, exercises towards *her work* is clearer when it is a question of man, “*her supreme masterpiece, the living image of her beauty and her perfection, ... the wonderful treasury of her wealth and in a unique way her representative on earth*” (no. 35). The first sin of mankind is a catastrophe, but one which brings about an overflow of tenderness and love: “*Eternal Wisdom was deeply moved by the plight of Adam and all his descendants. She was profoundly distressed at seeing her vessel of honour shattered, her image torn to pieces, her masterpiece destroyed, her representative in this world overthrown.*”

“*She listened tenderly to man's sighs and entreaties and she was moved with compassion when she saw the sweat of his brow, the tears in his eyes, the fatigue of his arms, his sadness of heart, his affliction of soul*” (no. 41). Going beyond the apparent naïveté of the language used, what is being described here is the power of the love which explains the decision concerning the Incarnation: “*I seem to see this loveable Sovereign convoking and assembling the most holy Trinity, a second time, so to speak, for the purpose of rehabilitating man in the state she formerly created him.*” “Rehabilitating” man, that is, setting him right, re-establishing him in the dignity of his original condition, giving him back what sin had wrenched from him. But how? “*Eternal Wisdom seeing that nothing on earth can expiate man's sin, that nothing can satisfy divine justice and appease God's anger and still, wishing to save unfortunate man whom she cannot help loving, finds a wonderful way of accomplishing this*” (no. 45).<sup>11</sup> This way is the Incarnation.

Montfort finds in his meditation on “*eternal and incarnate Wisdom*” a remarkably balanced understanding of the mystery of Jesus, *true God and*

*true man*. The pre-existence of Christ as a divine person cannot be forgotten, for the Jesus of history, by whom he lives, ***has always been, and always will be eternal Wisdom***, God equal to the Father, the splendour of his glory and the perfect image of his beauty, the creator and organiser of the world; he sees in this Wisdom a nearness to, and an almost congenital complicity with men, in whom she takes her delight and whose happiness she wishes to gain. There is certainly here for Montfort a progress in his discovery of the love of God for us.

On the other hand, the divine philanthropy of Wisdom explains the redemptive Incarnation: “*Finally, in order to draw closer to men and give them a more convincing proof of his love, eternal Wisdom went so far as to become man, even to become a little child, to embrace poverty and to die upon a cross for them*” (LEW n. 70). Montfort’s awareness of the humanity of Jesus is no less acute than his awareness of his divinity. His constant looking to Mary does not allow him to forget the reality of the Incarnation. ***Jesus is and will always remain henceforth a real man***, our brother, because he “*is always and everywhere the fruit and Son of Mary*” (TD 44).

### ***The Holy Spirit***

When he comes to the question of the Holy Spirit, Montfort takes up his position in the same context as when he speaks of the Father and of the Son: that of our salvation. We should not then look in the saint’s works for a theoretical exposition on the Person of the Holy Spirit. But, on the contrary, we find there many very precious indications, which have the advantage of referring us back to our own spiritual life, because here we are dealing with the Spirit in our own life-story.

Once again, it is in the bringing about of the Incarnation that Montfort finds this active presence of the Holy Spirit: it is he who forms Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary; he is his greatest masterpiece (TD 20), the “*masterpiece of his love*” (TD 269). The Son, who is given to us by the Father through love (TD 118; cf. Jn 3,16), becomes incarnate “*for us and for our salvation*”; the Holy Spirit also is involved through “*love*” in the mystery of the Incarnation, not only to “*form*” Jesus Christ himself, but also to bring to completion what is begun then: the whole Christ, Head and members (TD 20). The “*love*” of the Holy Spirit for us goes this far.

Montfort come back again and again, with great satisfaction, to the association of the Holy Spirit with Mary, “*his faithful and inseparable spouse*” (TD 36), not only for our birth into our life as children of God, but also for our growth in this life through an ever-stronger conformity with Christ, the first-born of a multitude of brothers. We will have reason to return

to this many times... For the moment let us simply notice that St. Louis Marie has seen how to keep the spotlight on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the whole of our spiritual life, and that he has grasped this for himself, including in his prayer; he asks us to keep this in mind too for ourselves. For him, there can be no “*true devotion*” to Mary if the Spirit does not inspire it.

Another aspect, highlighted by Montfort, the missionary, is the action of the Spirit in the apostolate of the Church and of Christians. The age of the Church is the age of the Holy Spirit, and the closer we draw to the end of time, the stronger must his action be. Here again, Montfort sees a close link between the Third Person of the Trinity and Mary. Because we have received baptism “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*”, it is in a loving and confident relationship with each of the divine Persons that we must live and bring to fulfilment our lives as children of God. In emphasising how Mary herself lived intensely and in a permanent way in union with and docility to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, Montfort shows us the ideal model of all Christian life. By inviting us to allow ourselves to be taught by Mary, he points out to us the best way to make our vocation as baptised people each day a little more real.

## **b) The mystery of the Incarnation**

**The mystery of Christ as eternal Wisdom, incarnate in Mary for the salvation of mankind** would appear to be the centre from which what one can call Montfortian spirituality reaches out, the unifying point of view which gives a particular colouring to one way of living the whole Christian life.

Montfort sees the Incarnation as a **blueprint-mystery**: it is in its light that he looks at the whole plan of God’s love for the salvation of the world; that he discovers the place and the mission of Mary: “*The plan adopted by the three persons of the Blessed Trinity in the Incarnation, the first coming of Jesus Christ, is adhered to each day in an invisible manner throughout the Church and they will pursue it to the end of time until the last coming of Jesus Christ*” (TD 22); it is also in the light of this mystery that he discovers the secret of the Marian way which he himself took to come to Jesus and which he proposes to us.

## **c) From the Incarnation to the Cross**

The road from the Incarnation to the Cross is not a long one for Montfort, for, according to his thinking, the Cross is present to Christ from the very first moment of his human existence in the womb of Mary. And, like

the Incarnation, the Cross is “*a mystery of Wisdom*”, because it is only in Jesus that it makes sense, and “*a mystery of wisdom*”, of that wisdom of God which is foolishness to the eyes of human wisdom, because it is the measure of God’s foolish love for us.

Already, Montfort stands in wonder before the paradox of the Incarnation, the way of abasement and dependence because Jesus “*took the form of a slave out of love for us ‘formam servi accipiens’*” (TD 72, cf. Phil 2,7); he stands in even greater wonder, if that is possible, before the paradox of the Cross, for the same reason: the Cross is the triumph of the love of Christ for us. The title of chapter XIV of LEW leaves us in no doubt on this subject: “*The Triumph of Eternal Wisdom in and by the Cross*”.

Listen to what Montfort says: “*The Cross is according to my belief the greatest secret of the King - the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom.*”

“*How remote and how different are the thoughts and the ways of eternal Wisdom from those of even the wisest of men. This great God wished to redeem the world, to cast out and chain up the devils, to seal the gates of hell and open heaven to men, and give infinite glory to his eternal Father... What means will be chosen by divine Wisdom?... He has but to will and all is done. But his power is regulated by his love... O wonder! He perceives something which is a source of scandal and horror to Jews and an object of foolishness to pagans. He sees a piece of vile and contemptible wood which is used to humiliate and torture the most wicked and the most wretched of men, called a gibbet, a gallows, a cross. It is upon this cross that he casts his eyes...*” (LEW 167-168).

For Montfort, the Cross allows Christ to show in the most striking manner his love for the father and for us. It is this love which constitutes the price; apart from this it would make absolutely no sense. It was precisely this sign of love given without limit which he wanted to demonstrate on the ‘Lande de la Madeleine’ at Pontchâteau, and in so many other places; it is this sign which he presented, without saying a word, to the people assembled in the church at Montfort, in 1707, and then offered to each one with the words: “*Here is your saviour; are you not very sorry for having offended him?*”

Because Wisdom (Jesus) is nothing but love, and because his cross is a sign of that love, Montfort can write: “*He has so truly incorporated and united himself with the Cross that in all truth we can say: Wisdom is the Cross, and the Cross is Wisdom*” (LEW no. 180). This is also why he sees Jesus as “*wedding the cross*” from the first moment of his human existence in the womb of Mary (LEW no. 169).

For him the conclusion to be drawn is very clear: it is impossible to find Jesus without going by way of the cross. Indeed this is the Gospel: “*If anyone wants to come after me, let him renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow me!*” (Mt 16,24), a text which Montfort comments on in the “*Letter to the Friends of the Cross*”. To choose Jesus is the only Christian wisdom; it means also to accept one’s portion of the cross so as to turn it into the sign and the price of love: “*The Cross in mystery, / Is veiled for us below. / Without great light to see, / Who shall its splendour know? / Alone the lofty mind / Shall this high secret trace; / And none shall heaven find / Who grasps it not by grace.*” (Hymn 19, *The Triumph of the Cross*, in *God Alone*, pg. 524).

## **d) Poverty**

Poverty assumes different aspects in Montfort’s life and works.

### ***A poverty which grounds him in God***

His personal poverty has straight away a theological dimension, for it is quite simply the expression of his faith in the love of the heavenly Father for him. There truly lies his “*treasure*”. And so his confidence is unshakeable, resulting in an effective detachment from that security which material goods or recourse to human support might give him. This is not to say that he would reject all recourse to natural means, in particular to certain sources of support which he was quite capable of appealing to at certain times, for example to come to the aid of his sisters; but this is not where his confidence lies - it is in God alone. This is the source of the security which we find in him at all times, and of his total freedom.

### ***A poverty which sets him close to the poor***

One almost immediate consequence of this radical detachment, is the capacity to give, to give without limit to those who are deprived of the things they need to live, whether it is a question of material poverty or spiritual poverty. Montfort’s attitude towards the poor flows from his own stance in poverty.

The behaviour of the inmates of the poorhouse in Poitiers is very revealing in this context: they did not know the young priest they had seen entering the chapel, yet they were immediately attracted by him. His external demeanour, “*dressed in clothes very much like their own*”<sup>12</sup>, set him very close to them. But there is also the astonishment they felt at seeing him pray for so long - about four hours! - in a recollection which was disturbed by

nothing at all. No doubt we need to take these two exceptional reasons together to explain the moving gesture made by these poor people: they organised a collection among themselves to come to his aid. Instinctively they sensed that this priest, who seemed at the same time so close to God and so close to them, was capable of understanding them, and that, despite the difference of social situation, he was “*one of them*”. And so they were to claim him as their chaplain: they were “*going about saying openly that I am to be their priest.*”<sup>13</sup>

It was not just because he gave them material help that, right through his life, Montfort attracted the poor to himself. It was because he loved them. This love of the poor, which is impossible except for those who live out the beatitude of poverty, supplies us with one of the keys to the spiritual physiognomy of St. Louis Marie.

### ***A poverty which enables him to share in the saving love of Christ***

It was for each one of us that Christ, eternal Wisdom, was made man, and that he went so far as to give his life on the Cross; he came to look for each of us to “*re-establish*” us and make us share in his riches as Son of the Father. In Montfort’s thought, the love of God translates immediately into love of one’s neighbour and into action to bring him to know and meet with Christ. For him, the “*mission*” springs from the very heart of Christ, for it is a sharing in his love for the Father and for his brethren. We should not be surprised, then, if he tries to model his missionary thrust on that of Christ, who comes to us, makes himself one of us, and saves us by the cross. To show this we need to go back to his life and to analyse in detail the testament he left to the “*Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary*” in his “*Manuscript Rule*”, the “*Prayer for Missionaries*” and the “*Letter to the members of the Company of Mary*”.

Very early on, Montfort began to live a life of demanding poverty based on a confident abandonment to God’s Providence and the option to go towards the poor... His practice of poverty, without losing anything of the richness of his primary intuition, began to reflect more and more the saving thrust of Christ himself. He does not quote the second Letter to the Corinthians 8,9: “*Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty*”, nor Philippians 2,5: “*In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus. His state was divine, yet he did not cling...*”. Yet these texts describe wonderfully well the spiritual attitude of Montfort and explain his apostolic fruitfulness: he set himself close to the poor, to the point of being looked upon as one of them, and he gave them everything; he had towards them the feelings Jesus had; often misunderstood, rejected, knocked about “*like a ball*

*in a game of tennis*”<sup>14</sup>, he lived out in his own way the hymn in the Letter to the Philippians. For him, poverty and the abandonment belonging to the cross, belong to the mission. And his way of being poor also points to the fact that apostolic effectiveness, in the end, comes from God alone, and not from human means.

A final aspect of his missionary poverty is to be found in his desire to live in dependence on Providence, that is in being willing to depend materially on those to whom he came in the name of God. He gives four reasons for this: *“Firstly, it is the example which Jesus Christ, the apostles and apostolic men have handed down to us. Secondly, God repays a hundredfold even in this world those who show charity to the missionaries and often (as experience proves) gives them the grace of conversion as a reward for their alms-giving. Thirdly, this mutual charity brings with it its own recompense in the form of a wonderful unanimity of heart between the faithful and the missionaries, who are preaching to them. Charity begets charity. Fourthly, the grace of a mission thus founded on Providence and on complete dependence on the people (a state of affairs most repugnant to proud nature) is, by far, the most effective and powerful means of converting sinners.”* (MR 50). He hastened, also, to share with the poor what he received, which added greater weight to the value of this witness. This was not a question of “technique”, but a matter of spirit and life.

### **e) Christian life and Baptism**

Montfort was always able to go straight to the essential things. For him, it was to the spring of Baptism that we must always return in order to discover what we truly are, what God, in his love, has made us; it is also in returning to our baptism that we find the guidelines we need to live in fidelity to the commitments it implies. Our Christian vocation is a call to holiness. To respond to that call, Montfort suggests that we *“go to Jesus through Mary”*, for Mary is the royal road to acquire and preserve Wisdom, and to be faithful to our baptismal promises. And we can have confidence in him, for he lived fully what he suggests for us. We will have occasion to return to this and develop this essential theme of baptism in looking at the “secret” of Christian life which St. Louis Marie hands on to us.

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# Part I

## Why should we make a place for Mary in our lives?

### Chapter One

*It is God who willed that Mary should have a place in his  
plan of salvation*

#### 1. GOD'S PLAN FOR US

##### a) The goal of our lives

*“Chosen soul, living image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God wants you to become holy like him in this life, and glorious like him in the next” (SM 3).*

Montfort makes us face what we are and what is the goal of our life: we come from God, who has made us into his “*living image*”, and we are made to go to him so as to share in his happiness. God is so attached to us that, in order to save us, he did not hesitate to “*buy us back*” through the “*precious blood of Jesus Christ*”! That is how much God thinks of us, and what we are worth in his eyes.

And he wants for us what any Father worthy of the name would want for his children: our happiness. God wants to give us everything: he proposes for us nothing less than to live like him, imitating his “holiness” even in this life, in order to share in his “glory” in the next. How, in fact, could we hope to be happy with the happiness of God if we did not share his life?

So Montfort continues: *“It is certain that growth in the holiness of God is your vocation. All your thoughts, words, actions, everything you suffer or undertake must lead you towards that end. Otherwise you are resisting God in not doing the work for which he created you and for which he is even now keeping you in being”* (SM 3).

These statements are not concerned only with certain privileged persons called by God to some exceptional holiness. Anyone who tries to take the Gospel seriously and to have confidence in Jesus should see them as addressed to himself. One would have to be Christ to dare say to all his followers: *“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”*, that is, *“Love as your Father knows how to love”*. *“Growth in the holiness of God”* is nothing else, in fact, than coming to love like him. Jesus tells us this in other words in *“his”* commandment: *“Love one another as I have loved you”* (Jn 15,12).

This call of Jesus is not an arbitrary prescription imposed on us from the outside: this law of love is written in the depths of our being. Experience is there to show us that only true love can make us happy. The ideal proposed by Christ, therefore, has value, and indeed an absolute value for us. Therefore each of us must try to tend towards it, according to his own means, in his own state of life, and in line with his particular vocation; otherwise, says Montfort, *“you are resisting God”*... and to resist God is to rush into failure.

## **b) The difficulty of the undertaking**

Montfort is a realist: he knows well enough that this is both wonderful... and very difficult: *“What a marvellous transformation is possible! Dust into light, uncleanness into purity, sinfulness into holiness, creature into Creator, man into God! A marvellous work, I repeat, so difficult in itself, and even impossible for a mere creature to bring about, for only God can accomplish it by giving his grace abundantly and in an extraordinary manner”* (SM 3). Who indeed has not, in moments of fervour, desired to really respond to the love of God for him, to truly live as a disciple of Jesus, putting fully into practice his commandment of love? And yet, so often, despite our good intentions, our resolutions and all our efforts, the results do not measure up to our desires. Faced with this realisation of failure, at least partial, the temptation may arise to give up the pursuit of an

ideal which ends by seeming inaccessible, and to resign ourselves to the mediocrity of a Christian life without any ambitions. We would be wrong in this: the word of God cannot be rejected. What we cannot achieve by our own powers alone (and it is often because we have believed too much in the ability to get there in this way that we have failed), we can achieve by grace, “for nothing is impossible for God”.

So what are we lacking? It is not knowledge of the means to be employed so as to live as children of God: *“The means of holiness and salvation are known to everybody, since they are found in the gospel; the masters of the spiritual life have explained them; the saints have practised them and shown how essential they are for those who wish to be saved and attain perfection. These means are: sincere humility, unceasing prayer, complete self-denial, abandonment to divine Providence, and obedience to the will of God”* (SM 4).

If it were enough to know all that to arrive at holiness, it would be so simple! But, we must put this into practice in our daily lives, and for that we have an absolute need of God’s help. Since God “wants all to be saved”, we are assured that he offers his grace to all and to everyone, according to their needs, their vocation and their mission (SM 5). We must welcome this grace and set it to work, and this is where our refusals and our negligence threaten to spoil everything.

### **c) The “secret” of success: find Mary**

Perhaps there is a solution, which, without letting us off from the efforts required by our collaboration with grace, would make our following of Christ towards holiness easier? Montfort gives us a resounding “Yes!”: *“It all comes to this, then. We must discover a simple means to obtain from God the grace needed to become holy. It is precisely this I wish to teach you. My contention is that you must first discover Mary if you would obtain this grace from God”* (SM 6). To “obtain this grace from God”, truly welcoming it, causing it to bear fruit, we need Mary: *“you must first discover Mary”*. The secret that Montfort wants to reveal to us is precisely a way of finding Mary by giving her as great a place in our lives as possible. Thus she will be able to fulfil for us, in the best possible circumstances, the mission the Lord confided to her: to lead us in a motherly way to the perfection of our Christian life.

## 2. “IF YOU WOULD BE PERFECT”

### a) “Jesus Christ... our only teacher, our only model”

What is necessary to be perfect? To love as God loves? Yes, but is there something more? Montfort is about to tell us, in his own way, which is that of a saint totally imbued with the Gospel. He does not bother with a theoretical definition of Christian perfection; he sends us straight to the one who is the source of our holiness, because he is the source of the life of God in us, namely Jesus: “*all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus...*” (TD 120). That is why “*Jesus, our Saviour, true God and true man must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions; otherwise they would be false and misleading. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of everything. ‘We labour,’ says St. Paul, ‘only to make all men perfect in Jesus Christ.’ For in him alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue and perfection... God has laid no other foundation for our salvation, perfection and glory than Jesus*” (TD 61).

And “*union with our Lord, in which Christian perfection consists*” (TD 152), leads to encounter with the Father, in the Spirit, and to service of our neighbour: “*Through him (Jesus Christ), with him and in him, we can do all things and render all honour and glory to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit; we can make ourselves perfect and be for our neighbour a fragrance of eternal life*” (TD 61).

### b) What is the place of Mary?

If there is no perfection or sanctity except in Jesus Christ, is there still a place for Mary and for devotion to her in our spiritual life? Certainly there is, provided that everything is in view of union with Jesus: “*If then we are establishing sound devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only in order to establish devotion to our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ*” (TD 62). But, for Montfort, Mary is not just one means among others, she is a necessary means, and even the “*most perfect*” means “*of approaching Jesus*” (TD 55; cf. 125, 130). He finds his justification for these statements in the mystery of the Incarnation.

## ***The one whom the Trinity chose for the Incarnation***

First of all, Mary is the one in whom and through whom eternal Wisdom was incarnated. She was chosen and prepared by the three Persons of the Trinity for this unique mission, and this is what explains her perfection:

*“God the Father, from whom, as from its essential source, every perfect gift and every grace come down to us, gave her every grace when he gave her his Son...”* (SM 9); *“God the Son came into her virginal womb as a new Adam into his earthly paradise, to take his delight there and produce hidden wonders of grace”* (TD 18). As for the Holy Spirit, he *“entrusted his wondrous gifts to Mary, his faithful spouse, and chose her as the dispenser of all he possesses...”* (TD 25). Montfort never ceases to sing of the splendour of her of whom the whole Trinity wished to make a “worthy Mother of God”: *“‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has the heart of man understood’ the beauty, the grandeur, the excellence of Mary, who is indeed a miracle of miracles of grace, nature and glory. ‘If you wish to understand the Mother,’ says a saint, ‘then understand the Son. She is a worthy Mother of God.’ ...”* (TD 12).

With the same sense of wonder, Vatican Council II says today: *“Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth”* (LG 53).

So this then is the final explanation and the source of the unequalled greatness of Mary: her vocation to be the Mother of eternal Wisdom, the only Son of the Father who becomes our brother and our Saviour by his Incarnation and, we must add, the way she was able to respond to what God expected of her.

We would be quite wrong to think that this greatness distances Mary from us. Quite the contrary, it brings her closer to us since her motherly mission towards Jesus finds its immediate prolongation in her spiritual maternity in our regard. Father de Montfort, who grasped this link with a special force, knew how to draw the right conclusions for his spiritual life. He invites us to draw them in our turn for our own spiritual life.

## ***The one with whom the Trinity continues what was started in the Incarnation***

In contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, Montfort discovers a way of acting on God's part which is to be found afterwards in the whole process of salvation: "*The plan adopted by the three persons of the Blessed Trinity in the Incarnation, the first coming of Jesus Christ, is adhered to each day in an invisible manner throughout the Church and they will pursue it to the end of time until the last coming of Jesus Christ*" (TD 22).

Since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit willed to have need of Mary for the Incarnation, the mystery which inaugurates the age of the New Testament and makes possible everything that Jesus was to accomplish for us, they wish to continue needing her to bring to its fulfilment what was begun then. Therefore they ask Mary to involve herself as a mother in bringing forth to divine life the members of Christ that we are. The choice of Mary by God as Mother of Christ includes in fact his choice of her as Mother of men and women:

*"God the Father imparted to Mary his fruitfulness as far as a mere creature was capable of receiving it, to enable her to bring forth his Son and all the members of his mystical body"* (TD 17).

*"God the Son wishes to form himself, and, in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in his members through his dear Mother..."* (TD 31).

*"God the Holy Spirit wishes to fashion his chosen ones in and through Mary. He tells her... 'You are always my spouse, as faithful, pure, and fruitful as ever. May your faith give me believers; your purity, virgins; your fruitfulness, elect and living temples.'" (TD 34).*

## ***Mary, the way to union with Jesus***

The very illuminating metaphor of the "road" or of the "way" is a frequent one in Montfort's thought.

Because Mary is the way taken by Jesus for his first coming into our world by the Incarnation, this is the way he will continue to use to come to us more and more each day so as to establish his kingdom: "*It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world*" (TD 1). In the same way, this is the way he will take for his second coming: "*When our loving Jesus comes in glory once again to reign upon earth - as he certainly will - he will choose no other road for his journey than the Blessed Virgin, by whom he came so surely and so perfectly the first time*" (TD 158).

Since Mary is the road Jesus willed to take to come to join us, we will not be able to find a better one to go to him. In fact, this *“is the path which Jesus Christ opened up in coming to us and in which there is no obstruction to prevent us reaching him”* (TD 152). Also, those who set out on this road *“will advance with giant strides towards Jesus along the same road which, as it is written, Jesus took to come to us with giant strides and in a short time”* (TD 155). A perfect road prepared so that eternal Wisdom could come to us, it retains its perfection for us, which leads Montfort to exclaim: *“Show me a new road to our Lord, pave it with all the merits of the saints, adorn it with their heroic virtues, illuminate and enhance it with the splendour and beauty of the angels, have all the angels and saints there to guide and protect those who wish to follow it. Give me such a road and truly, truly, I boldly say - and I am telling the truth - that instead of this road, perfect though it be, I would still choose the immaculate way of Mary... a road without stain or spot, without original sin or actual sin, without shadow or darkness...”* (TD 158).

### ***The metaphor of the “Mould”***

The metaphor of the *“mould”* completes and enriches that of the *“road”*. It is not just a matter of going to Jesus to meet with him; we must try to assimilate his traits spiritually, so as to be as like to him as possible and to become capable of imitating his way of living: *“Christianus, alter Christus... the Christian is another Christ.”*

Here again, we know it is difficult. But, again starting from his own experience, Montfort shows us a simple and efficacious method: *“A sculptor can make a statue or a life-like model in two ways: (i) By using his skill, strength, experience and good tools to produce a statue out of hard, shapeless matter; (ii) By making a cast of it in a mould. The first way is long and involved and open to all sorts of accidents. It only needs a faulty stroke of the chisel or hammer to ruin the whole work. The second is quick, easy, straightforward, almost effortless and inexpensive, but the mould must be perfect and true to life and the material must be easy to handle and offer no resistance”* (SM 16; cf. TD 220).

The second way which Montfort advises us to adopt has indisputable advantages over that which would have us remake ourselves in the image of Christ, even relying on grace. Mary is the *“mould”* in whom we can cast ourselves with confidence, in order to be in some way *“remade”*, *“reshaped”*, in the likeness of Jesus.

Again it is the mystery of the Incarnation which supplies Montfort with the justification for his claim: what Mary accomplished for her Son in

this mystery, she is called to carry on doing for us. Since God made her capable of bringing forth and “forming” Jesus, she is by that very fact capable of giving to us as a mother, on the spiritual level, the traits of her Son, *“the first-born of many brothers”* (Rom 8,29): *“Mary is the great mould of God, fashioned by the Holy Spirit to give human nature to a Man who is God by the hypostatic union, and to fashion through grace men who are like to God. No godly feature is missing from this mould. Everyone who casts himself into it and allows himself to be moulded will acquire every feature of Jesus Christ, true God, with little pain or effort, as befits his weak human condition”* (SM 17).

In the *Treatise on True Devotion*, Montfort expresses the same idea: *“St. Augustine calls the Blessed Virgin forma Dei: the mould of God..., the mould capable of forming god-men (people like to Christ). Anyone who is cast into this divine mould is quickly shaped and moulded into Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ into him. At little cost and in a short time he will become a god-man (Christ-like) since he is cast into the very same mould that fashioned a God-man”* (TD 219).

As with the metaphor of the “road”, Montfort insists on the advantages of this way of doing things: everything is easier, quicker and more efficacious with Mary. This presupposes on our part a total confidence and docility; it is a matter, indeed, of abandoning ourselves as fully as possible to the maternal action of Mary, so that she might be able to fashion us to her own liking, making us what the Father wants us to be: like to her Son. For this we need *“smelters and moulders who have discovered the beautiful mould of Mary where Jesus was so divinely and so naturally formed. They do not rely on their own skill but on the perfection of the mould. They cast and lose themselves in Mary where they become true models of her Son”* (TD 220).

Montfort is right: we have everything to gain in giving ourselves as children to Mary; we would have much to lose by wanting to go away from her. So let us be convinced: *“You may think this a beautiful and convincing comparison. But how many understand it? I would like you, my dear friend, to understand it. But remember that only molten and liquefied substances may be poured into a mould. That means that you must crush and melt down the old Adam in you if you wish to acquire the likeness of the new Adam in Mary”* (TD 221). This last reminder is important, for we must *“rid ourselves of all that is evil in us”* (TD 78). Montfort will get us to return to this.



### **3. MARY IS NECESSARY FOR US**

Montfort wants to convince us that Mary is necessary for us because God himself, in his wisdom and goodness, has decided it should be so.

#### **a) God willed to have need of Mary for the Incarnation**

Montfort is fully aware that this is a question of a totally free decision on the part of the Almighty: “... *this great Lord, who is ever independent and self-sufficient, never had and does not now have any absolute need of the Blessed Virgin for the accomplishment of his will and the manifestation of his glory. To do all things he has only to will them*” (TD 14). But, in order to save us, he in fact chose the way of the Incarnation which comes about through the birth of the sacred humanity of the Word in the womb of a woman of Adam’s race: Mary. We will see later the spiritual consequences for ourselves which Montfort sees as flowing from this voluntary “*dependence*” which the three Persons of the Trinity, not simply eternal Wisdom, willed to have on Mary in the Incarnation.

Faithful to himself, God continues to act as he began, using henceforth, for the working out of his plan of salvation until its full accomplishment, the same “means” which brought about the Incarnation: “*However, I declare that, considering things as they are, because God has decided to begin and accomplish his greatest works through the Blessed Virgin ever since he created her, we can safely believe that he will not change his plan in the time to come, for he is God and therefore does not change in his thoughts or his way of acting*” (TD 15). And the Handmaid of the Lord continues to say “yes” to whatever he asks of her. So it is not we who choose Mary in the first place, and ask her to come into our lives to help us to be united to Jesus; *it is we who are given by God to Mary as her children.*

#### **b) Jesus willed to give us his Mother**

We must take very seriously the words Jesus addressed on the cross to his Mother as he pointed to his disciple (who represents each one of us): “*Woman, this is your son.*” In any case, Mary herself never ceases to hear these words and to take note of them, as the Council reminded us: “*Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation... By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on*

*earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home*” (LG 62). That is to say, we are constantly under the loving eye of Mary.

**c) Since God willed that Mary should be necessary, we must take account of this**

This is the conclusion that Montfort draws from this association of Mary with the action of God: “*we must conclude that, being necessary to God by a necessity which is called ‘hypothetical’, (that is, because God so willed it), the Blessed Virgin is all the more necessary for men to attain their final end. Consequently we must not place devotion to her on the same level as devotion to the other saints as if it were merely something optional*” (TD 39). This is a far-reaching claim: if we would respect the will of God, we must follow through with the consequences of the maternal mission he confided to Mary in our regard.

Mary, it is true, does not wait for us to learn that she is our mother or that we recognise her as such, before taking care of us. Happily! But for those who have received the grace of knowing it, it is a strict duty to take account of this gift of God contained in the presence of Mary in our lives. Montfort tries by all the means at his disposal to convince us of this.

Therefore we must listen to the words which Jesus continues to address to us in showing us Mary: “*This is your mother.*” If we become truly aware of their meaning, we will then understand that the only way to thank Jesus for the gift he has made us of his mother, is to welcome her into our lives, taking her “*into our homes*”, as did “*the disciple*” (Jn 19, 25-27; see TD 144, 179, 216, 266; SM 66). Let us not be afraid, then, of having and of cultivating what Montfort calls a “*true devotion*” towards Mary, so as, at one and the same time, to thank her for what she has done and what she continues to do for us, and to make her action in us more efficacious through our voluntary collaboration.

It is not only Montfort who invites us to do this: the Church herself, according to the Vatican Council II, gives us the example: “*...(Mary) is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honours charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honours her with filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother.*” (LG 53). This text is very strong, because the inspiration for this attitude on the part of the Church is attributed directly to the Holy Spirit.

Here is another statement of the Council: *“The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary (dealing with the maternal mission which she exercises in total dependence on her Son), which it constantly experiences and recommends to the heartfelt attention of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may the more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer”* (LG 62). We should weigh these terms: the Church has a deep faith in this maternal action of Mary because she *“professes”* it and affirms it with a very strong conviction; and, more than this, she has an awareness of living by it: *“which it constantly experiences”*; and finally she desires that all should live this same reality, because she *“recommends (it) to the heartfelt attention of the faithful.”*

#### **d) Why this “necessity” of Mary?**

Mary is certainly the creature who is most perfect and most perfectly united to Jesus, but why should we want to go through her to come to her Son? Would it not be, in the final analysis, simpler and more perfect to go directly to Christ, our unique Mediator?

The reply which both Montfort and the Vatican Council II give should be enough: because God himself has willed that Mary should have her role to play in our spiritual lives, we simply have to accept that. But God does not do anything without “reasons”, even if his reasons are not ours. And, as far as we can discover them, they may throw light for us on certain aspects of our spiritual life.

First of all, this necessity of Mary does not mean that the mediation of Christ is not enough. Father de Montfort would immediately come out against the idea that Mary could be necessary for us because there was something missing in the mediation of Christ: if Mary is able to do something for us, she owes this to her Son, and it is to him that she leads us. Vatican II reminds us of this in these words: *“...the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. It does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ but on the contrary fosters it”* (LG 60).

So then, where are we to look for these “reasons” of God? In his love for us: *“God had his reasons for giving us mediators with him. He saw our unworthiness and helplessness and had pity on us. To give us access to his mercies he provided us with powerful advocates...”* (TD 83). It is, therefore, in order to make things easier for us that Mary is given to us.

The first among these intercessors is Christ, the Mediator in the strongest sense and by a unique title: *“Our Lord is our Advocate and our Mediator of redemption with God the Father. It is through him that we must pray with the whole Church, triumphant and militant. It is through him that we have access to God the Father. We should never appear before God, our Father, unless we are supported by the merits of his Son, and, so to speak, clothed in them...”* (TD 84). There is no question, therefore of wanting to bypass Jesus.

Montfort knows very well that no-one can be a “mediator” in the same sense as Christ - neither the saints, nor even Mary. But that does not stop him affirming quite simply: *“We need a mediator with the Mediator himself”* (TD 83-86). This is his fourth fundamental truth concerning devotion to the Blessed Virgin.<sup>1</sup>

To help us to understand the need we have of Mary, he insists on our situation as sinners and on our unworthiness. The awareness that we should have of this could produce fear in us, a certain fear of going directly, not only to the Father, but also to Jesus himself. These feelings are not the sign of a perfect faith, or of a complete abandonment of oneself in confidence to the love of the Father and of Jesus for us, it is true... they are none the less real for that, however, and experience shows that they can have the effect of paralysing us. Montfort knows that, but he also knows how well Mary can help us to overcome this fear: *“If we are afraid of going directly to Jesus, who is God, because of his infinite greatness, or our lowliness, or our sins, let us implore without fear the help and intercession of Mary, our Mother. She is kind, she is tender, and there is nothing harsh or forbidding about her, nothing too sublime or too brilliant. When we see her, we see our own human nature at its purest. She is not the sun, dazzling our weak sight by the brightness of its rays... She is so full of love that no one who asks for her intercession is rejected, no matter how sinful he may be...”* TD 85.

God deals with us as we are: as men and women, and sinners at that. We have distanced ourselves from him, so he comes close to us, to the point of “humanising” himself in Jesus Christ, so as to make himself more approachable. And so as to make things even easier for us, he gives us Mary as our Mother. God tells us also through this that we do need a mother for our spiritual lives. In this way he is responding to deep needs within us. The almost spontaneous attraction towards Mary felt by those to whom she has been well presented, is witness to this; all those who take her “into their own homes” know it by experience. The poorest of the poor, those in the greatest trials, the sinners who, despite everything, retain the desire to get out of their sin, are not the last to feel themselves surrounded by her maternal love.

The more precious a gift of God is, the more we must respect it. This is why it is so important to welcome Mary, knowing what her mission is in our regard and what attitude we ought to have towards her.

## 4. LINK WITH BAPTISM

### a) At the heart of our Christian life

Montfort is perfectly logical. He never forgets that devotion to Mary, that is, our concrete attitude towards her, must lead us to Christ. He sees Mary as totally “*relative*” to her Son, completely oriented towards him, created to give him to us and to help us to be faithful to him. That is why, in Montfort’s thinking, “*true devotion to the Blessed Virgin*” must be set naturally and organically at the heart of the new life which is given to us in Baptism. The constant preoccupation of Montfort in his missionary activity was to recall to Christians the riches of their Baptism and to invite them in a persuasive manner to make a generous renewal of its “*vows and promises*”. This is what he writes in the *Treatise on True Devotion*: “‘*Men*’ says St. Thomas, ‘*vow in baptism to renounce the devil and all his seductions.*’ ‘*This vow,*’ says St. Augustine, ‘*is the greatest and the most indispensable of all vows.*’ *Canon Law experts say the same thing... But does anyone keep this great vow? Does anyone fulfil the promises of baptism faithfully? Is it not true that nearly all Christians prove unfaithful to the promises made to Jesus in baptism? Where does this universal failure come from, if not from man’s habitual forgetfulness of the promises and responsibilities of baptism and from the fact that scarcely anyone makes a personal ratification of the covenant contract made with God through his sponsors?*” (TD 127).

### b) The “covenant contract”

According to Montfort, forgetfulness of the law of life inscribed in our hearts by baptism was one of the principal causes of the lukewarmness and laxity of the Christians of his own day. Is it any different in ours? We can apply to our own account the warning and especially the advice of St Louis Marie. To remedy the state of things which he saw and deplored, he asked all those who had truly “*made the mission*”, that is, faithfully followed all the exercises proposed for them, to sign a formula of what he called a “*covenant contract*”. This had a sub-title: “*Vows and Promises of Holy Baptism*”.

A “*covenant contract*”... this expression is rich in meaning. The term “contract” emphasises the serious nature of a commitment made with full knowledge of the facts. As for the word “*covenant*”, in the text of the *Treatise on True Devotion* as well as in the contracts made at the end of a mission, Montfort uses it as applying immediately to the conduct of the Christian whom he invites to renew or strengthen his union with God. But he knows well that if we can thus “make a covenant” with the Lord, it is because he has already come to take possession of us. Even if Montfort does not himself use the words, we do not betray his thought in saying that it is God who is at the origin of the covenant; it is he who proposes it to us and asks that we ratify it in a profession of faith which commits us to live according to it.

The Montfortian formula of “*covenant contract*” has two parts. The first is the renewal in the strict sense of the “*vows and promises of baptism*”. It begins with a profession of faith: “*I firmly believe all the truths of the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.*” There follows the renunciation “*for ever, of the Devil, the world, sin and myself.*” The renunciation of self has its roots in the gospel formula: “*If anyone wants to come after me, let him renounce himself...*” (Mt 16,24). Montfort has grasped the great importance of this, as we will have occasion to see.

St. Louis Marie then comes to the commitment which could be called normal or minimal: “*I promise, by the grace of God which will never be lacking, faithfully to keep all the Commandments of God and of the Church, avoiding all mortal sin and its occasions, including bad company.*”

This is already quite a lot, yet Montfort adds his own personal note by introducing the gift of oneself to Jesus Christ *through the hands of Mary*, and the mention of the Cross which one must carry after Jesus: “*I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, to carry my cross after him all the days of my life.*”

As can be seen, it is to all those who want to live as Christians that Montfort addresses his invitation to take the Marian road so as to be given to Christ. The mention of “*carrying my cross*” also comes from the gospel text on following Christ: “*let him take up his cross and follow me*” (Mt 16.24). So here we find a sort of summary of the spiritual orientations of Montfort, and we can see how deeply rooted in the Gospel they are.

The second part of the “*covenant contract*” formula expresses the “resolutions” of the one who has thus renewed his or her baptismal commitment.

But what is it that allows Montfort to introduce into a renewal of the vows and promises of baptism the entire gift of oneself to Jesus Christ, and particularly to have it made through the hands of Mary?

### **c) We belong to Christ through baptism**

Montfort reminds us that, through baptism, Christ has taken possession of us, in such a way that we belong entirely to him: *“From what Jesus Christ is in regard to us we must conclude, as St. Paul says, that we belong not to ourselves but entirely to him as his members and his slaves, for he bought us at an infinite price - the shedding of his Precious Blood... Baptism made us in very truth slaves of Jesus. We must therefore live, work and die for the sole purpose of bringing forth fruit for him, glorifying him in our body and letting him reign in our soul. We are his conquest, the people he has won, his heritage”* (TD 68).

This language may surprise us. We must understand it correctly. Filled with Biblical references, this text reminds us that Jesus does not come to take possession of us as a despot or tyrant might do, but, on the contrary, he comes as a Saviour, to free us from evil; he comes as a friend to beg for the free response of our love. To recognise this belonging to Christ, and to want to bear fruit for him, is quite simply to live out our baptism...and to succeed in life. We can, it is true, refuse this covenant, but then we bring about our own unhappiness by shutting ourselves up in slavery to sin and the devil. If, on the contrary, as the Church and Montfort invite us to do, we ratify it with all our hearts, then we share in the victory of Christ over the forces of evil, over sin and death, and we learn to walk in the freedom of the children of God.

### **d) We belong also to Mary**

Listen to Montfort: *“What I say in an absolute sense of our Lord, I say in a relative sense of our Blessed Lady. Jesus, in choosing her as his inseparable associate in his life, glory and power in heaven and on earth, has given her by grace in his kingdom all the same rights and privileges that he possesses by nature...”* (TD 74).

Baptism involves for us a dependence on Mary. She could not truly be *“our Mother in the order of grace”* (LG) if she had no role to play at that moment above all moments when we receive the life of a child of God. And, since she is involved maternally in this birth, it follows that she is also involved in whatever has to do with the development of the life which she helped to give us. Vatican Council II tells us this in these words: *“The Son*

*whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), that is, the faithful, in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love” (LG 63).*

Our mother has received from God himself all that is necessary for her to accomplish her mission in our regard: *“Mary received from God a far-reaching dominion over the souls of the elect. Otherwise she could not make her dwelling-place in them as God the Father has ordered her to do, and she could not conceive them, nourish them, and bring them forth to eternal life as their mother. She could not have them for her inheritance and her possession and form them in Jesus and Jesus in them. She could not implant in their heart the roots of her virtues, nor be the inseparable associate of the Holy Spirit in all these works of grace. None of these things, I repeat, could she do unless she had received from the Almighty rights and authority over their souls. For God, having given her power over his only-begotten and natural Son, also gave her power over his adopted children - not only in what concerns their body - which would be of little account - but also in what concerns their soul” (TD 37).*

It is the three Persons of the Blessed trinity who give Mary her motherly power over us, continuing, in a certain way, the “motherly power” which she had over the only Son of the Father become her child. At the Incarnation, she gave to the Word his human life and she exercised her maternal authority over him for his human up-bringing.

The “power” of Mary is seen therefore first of all as a power “*of giving life*”, a motherly power which is based in love, is exercised in love, and calls forth love. May we be able to respond to this power somewhat as Jesus was able to do so!

When she engages in her maternal mission, Mary remains “*the handmaid of the Lord*”. In no way seeking her own interests, she has absolutely no trace of a selfish or possessive mother about her. To lead us to Jesus, to facilitate our union with him in the power of the Spirit, so that we might fulfil to the full our vocation as children of the Father, such is the end she pursues, for the glory of God and our happiness. According to one of Montfort’s beautiful phrases, she is “*the Virgin most faithful to God and to men*” (LEW 222; SM 40).

We have every reason to let ourselves be convinced. What St. Louis Marie tells us of the need we have of Mary in order to follow Christ and remain faithful to the promises of our baptism, is in perfect accord with the teaching of the Magisterium, as we can see especially today with Vatican Council II and Pope John Paul II. And if we have discovered Mary as God created her and as he gave her to us, that is, as Mother of Jesus and our



Mother, we can grasp very easily how close she is to us and how she can and, indeed, wants to help us to succeed in our life. To see better what our attitude towards her ought to be, let us continue to consult St. Louis Marie: he will tell us what “*true devotion to the Blessed Virgin*” consists in.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### TRUE DEVOTION AND THE “PERFECT PRACTICE”

If having a “*true devotion*” to Mary is necessary for any baptised person aware of the mission which Mary is charged by the Lord to exercise towards us, it is clear that an obligation cannot be laid on everyone to embrace “*the perfect practice*” recommended by St Louis Marie. This may be presented as an exceptional option offered, to respond to what Christ expects from us towards his Mother by according her the best possible place in our lives; or as a chance to try to go with Mary to the limit of the demands of our baptism.

We have every reason, therefore, to think that this way of living true devotion to Mary merits the name “*perfect*” which Montfort attributes to it. It is clear, in fact, that it is not possible to go further in willing to give oneself to Christ, or in depending on him in daily life, at least if we take the consecration and its living out seriously, by interior practice. But this is not to say that those who adopt it are by that very fact more perfect than others, and still less that everyone must embrace it<sup>2</sup>. It is for each one to hear the invitation: “*If you want...*”, and respond to it according to their own grace.

That said, it is permitted to insist on the advantages which it offers. On top of all those we have already had occasion to speak of, we must emphasise the fact that, because of its simplicity and its great flexibility, it is possible to adopt this method in every walk of life and to make a place for it within any other spiritual way: it is enough, in fact, to live these out “*with Mary*”.

## Chapter Two

### *“True Devotion” to the Blessed Virgin*

#### **1. THE CHOICE TO BE MADE OF “TRUE DEVOTION” TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN**

How often do we say to God, while saying the “Lord’s Prayer”: *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*. If there were an area in which doing God’s will should be easy for us, it is in accepting Mary in our life by according her the place which he desires her to have. To succeed in that, Montfort tells us, we need *“to make the right choice of the true devotion to our Blessed Lady, for now more than ever there are false devotions to her which can easily be mistaken for true ones”* (TD 90).

If we take full account of what he has already taught us, we will avoid certain snares. In fact, we know that our Marian devotion must be part and parcel of our Christian life: it must, therefore, lead us to Jesus, commit us in a gift of ourselves *“to Jesus Christ”*; it must allow us to be more faithful to the promises of our baptism, *“ridding us of what is evil in us”*; it must lead us to live as children of the Father, to love as Jesus has commanded us to do, to become more and more docile to the Holy Spirit.

Let us now see what qualities this *“true devotion”* must have.

##### **a) “True devotion is interior”**

*“First, true devotion to our Lady is interior, that is, it comes from within the mind and the heart and follows from the esteem in which we hold her, the high regard we have for her greatness, and the love we bear her”* (TD 106).

Here we are at the opposite pole to *“external (superficial)”* devotees, classed by Montfort as among the *“false devotees”* because *“all that appeals to them is the emotional aspect of this devotion, but the substance of it has no appeal at all”* (TD 96); they are then people who give up everything at the least difficulty.

### ***Knowing Mary (“from within the mind”)***

“*True devotion*” demands a genuine knowledge of the Blessed Virgin, which leads one to have an esteem for her and a good appreciation of her greatness. We must, therefore, try to discover Mary in her perfection, just as God made her. But, notice! Montfort certainly does not mean by this that “true devotion” is reserved for the “scholars” or for experts in the field of Marian theology. He tells us, on the contrary, that he is writing for “*mainly for the poor and simple who have more good will and faith than the common run of scholars. As they believe more simply and more meritoriously...*” (TD 26). It is *in faith*, rather, that we must look for this genuine knowledge of Mary, and it is *on faith* that we must rely to live by it. And that is open to the humblest of Christians.

We must look for this knowledge of Mary first of all in the Word of God, beginning with the Gospels. Then we can go to the saints who have spoken in a particular way about the Blessed Virgin, because she held a large place in their spiritual lives. They are able to tell us how they saw Mary and how she helped them to find Christ, not only through academic knowledge - all the better if they had plenty of this - but especially through their experience of lived faith. Such a one is Montfort.

Those who are able to do so - and they are numerous - will not be afraid to consult the great texts of the Magisterium which tell us today what the Church’s thinking on Mary is. Up till now, we have never before had such a collection of documents at our disposal as we have today, giving us such a rich and complete teaching on Mary, and at the same time furnishing us with a link with the life of the Church and the personal life of Christians.

We have to cite first of all *Chapter 8 of the Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council, which remains an obligatory point of reference; then, the major interventions of Pope Paul VI (notably the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*), and those of Pope John Paul II, who gave us the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, in which we find often enough the spirit of St. Louis Marie de Montfort.

### ***Loving Mary (“from within the heart”)***

“*True devotion*” also proceeds “*from the heart*”. We have to love Mary to desire to know her better. But, apart from that, love opens up the mind, which then becomes “*intelligence of the heart*”, always ready to welcome whatever can enrich our knowledge of the loved one. If we love Mary, we will be ready to make great efforts to know her better and, above all, we will be disposed to *understand from within*; then our love will be able to feed on our knowledge.

We can have confidence in Montfort: his way of presenting this first quality of “*true devotion*” is in perfect agreement with the teaching of Vatican II: “*Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to recognise the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love towards our mother and to the imitation of her virtues*” (LG 67).

### **b) “True devotion is trustful”**

The second quality of any true devotion is that it be “trustful”. Montfort explains what he means in an admirable passage where we sense that, no doubt without being aware of it, he tells us of his own experience: “*Second, it is trustful, that is to say, it fills us with confidence in the Blessed Virgin, the confidence that a child has for its loving Mother. It prompts us to go to her in every need of body and soul with great simplicity, trust and affection. We implore our Mother's help always, everywhere, and for everything. We pray to her to be enlightened in our doubts, to be put back on the right path when we go astray, to be protected when we are tempted... Finally, in all our afflictions of body and soul, we naturally turn to Mary for help, with never a fear of importuning her or displeasing our Lord*” (TD 107).

Here we are far removed from those “*critical devotees*” who “*are for the most part proud scholars, people of independent and self-satisfied minds, who...criticise nearly all those forms of devotion to her which simple and pious people use to honour their good Mother...*” (TD 93); far removed also from “*scrupulous devotees*”, who “*imagine they are slighting the Son by honouring the Mother. They fear that by exalting Mary they are belittling Jesus*” (TD 94).

### **c) “True devotion is holy”**

“*Third, true devotion to our Lady is holy, that is, it leads us to avoid sin and to imitate the virtues of Mary...*” (TD 108).

### ***An essential point of reference***

Here we have a very important criterion for assessing the value of our devotion to Mary and the quality of our Christian life. Do we really want to follow Christ, and does this desire influence our behaviour? Do we try to respond to his love for us by our faithfulness? Are we seeking to do the will of the Father? If so, then, yes, our devotion to Mary can only be good, and

we can safely rely on it. On the other hand, we cannot boast of having a “true devotion” to Mary if we are making no effort to live in fidelity to our vocation as baptised persons, which is to tend towards holiness. So let us not be among those whom Montfort calls:

**“Hypocritical devotees” and “presumptuous devotees”**

*“Hypocritical devotees” are those who “hide their sins and evil habits under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin so as to appear to their fellow-men different from what they are” (TD 102).*

*“Presumptuous devotees are sinners who give full rein to their passions or their love of the world, and who, under the fair name of Christian and servant of our Lady, conceal pride, avarice, lust, drunkenness, anger, swearing, slandering, injustice and other vices. They sleep peacefully in their wicked habits, without making any great effort to correct them, believing that their devotion to our Lady gives them this sort of liberty. They convince themselves that God will forgive them...because they say the Rosary, fast on Saturdays...” (TD 97).*

In this passage, Montfort rightly castigates those who, on the pretext that they make some external gestures of Marian piety, do not take the trouble to leave behind their sins and their bad habits, who live in a false sense of security, and become objects of scandal. St. Louis Marie is indignant at such behaviour: *“Nothing in our Christian religion is so deserving of condemnation as this diabolical presumption. How can we truthfully claim to love and honour the Blessed Virgin when by our sins we pitilessly wound, pierce, crucify and outrage her Son? If Mary made it a rule to save by her mercy this sort of person, she would be condoning wickedness and helping to outrage and crucify her Son. Who would even dare to think of such a thing?” (TD 98).*

So here we are warned: Mary can only commit us to fidelity to her Son. Ceaselessly, with all the strength of her persuasive gentleness, she says to us again and again: *“Do whatever he tells you.”*

Is it necessary, then, to be perfect already? No, and Montfort knows this well: *“I admit that to be truly devoted to our Lady, it is not absolutely necessary to be so holy as to avoid all sin, although this is desirable. But at least it is necessary (note what I am going to say),*

*(1) to be genuinely determined to avoid at least all mortal sin, which outrages the Mother as well as the Son;*

*(2) to practise self-restraint in order to avoid sin;*

(3) *to join her confraternities, say the Rosary and other prayers, fast on Saturdays, and so on.*" (TD 99).

Montfort is good at putting things in order and drawing our attention to what is most important: the essential fidelity to the will of God for us, which finds expression in the sincere resolution to avoid whatever might lead to a break with him, which would constitute a denial of our "covenant contract" with Christ, that is, serious sin. This, being incompatible with the love that we owe to God, separates us from him who is the source of our divine life. It is rightfully called "*mortal*", because it is a real spiritual suicide.

But what about the one who finds himself in fact trapped in a situation of sin, from which he suffers without having for the time being the strength to get out of it? Is everything lost for such a one? That would be contrary to the Gospel. For the person who at least has the courage to recognise his sin and who retains a confidence in the love of God and of Mary for him, everything is still possible: the *desire* to get out of this, *prayer* asking for the strength necessary for conversion, *efforts* still able to be made to seek what is good - all these are already a start along the right road. One's attitude towards the Lord and towards Mary can in those circumstances be "true": this is the attitude of the sinner who hopes for deliverance and salvation.

Our life is a "*pilgrimage in faith*" towards an ever-deeper union with the Lord. The sinner who fulfils the minimal conditions we have just mentioned, and who takes that strong hand with himself which is presently possible "*to avoid sin*", is already on the way... And, if he looks to Mary, the "*Refuge of sinners*", with confidence, how can his attitude towards her not be "true"?

In these circumstances, and only then, practices of Marian devotion have their value. If Montfort puts them only in third place, it is certainly not because he considers them unimportant: he will in fact suggest them. But, always faithful to the Gospel, which calls first of all for an attachment of the heart and looks to that "*interior*" transformation which the Holy Spirit wants to bring about in us, he reminds us that it is not those who honour the Lord, or Mary, with their lips, without seeking to do what they ask of us, who are near to them or to the Kingdom.

#### **d) "True devotion is disinterested"**

*"Fifth, true devotion to Mary is disinterested. It inspires us to seek God alone in his Blessed Mother and not ourselves. The true subject of Mary does not serve his illustrious Queen for selfish gain. He does not serve her*

*for temporal or eternal well-being but simply and solely because she has the right to be served and God alone in her. He loves her not so much because she is good to him or because he expects something from her, but simply because she is loveable. That is why he loves and serves her just as faithfully in weariness and dryness of soul as in sweet and sensible fervour. He loves her as much on Calvary as at Cana...*” (TD 110).

St. Louis Marie once again sets before us the ideal. Let us not be discouraged if we honestly have to admit that we have not yet reached this. That does not mean that we have to class ourselves, without any right of appeal, among those false devotees whom Montfort calls “*self-interested devotees*”; he describes them in this way: they are people “*who turn to her only to win a court-case, to escape some danger, to be cured of some ailment, or have some similar need satisfied. Except when in need they never think of her...*” (TD 103). In other words, they think only of themselves, seeking only their own interests. They do not care to take an interest in others, in Mary in particular, except when they think they can gain some advantage from it, usually indeed some material advantage. These perfect egoists who, deep down, love only themselves, can only be false devotees.

But, between the finished perfection of those who have arrived at a real “*disinterestedness*” as described by Montfort, which can only be the fruit of a perfect love, and those who remain stuck in concern for themselves with no sense of a need to move out of that, there is room, thank God, for all those who are on the way and who are seeking to go forward.

Besides, we must recognise that “*disinterestedness*”, even when perfect, does not exclude the legitimate love which we must have for ourselves, nor seeking for and asking for those good things that God offers us. It is not then a question of renouncing the right to ask Mary for what we believe is good for us. On the contrary - and Montfort has clearly recommended this when he explained that “*true devotion*” must be “*trustful*” - Mary is given to us as “*the most tender of mothers*”, ready to respond to the least appeal from her children.

But there is the question of the manner in which we should look to Mary and place our confidence in her. The question is: have we begun to love Mary for herself, freely, independently of what we might expect from her? If we think too much about ourselves, then our requests will be motivated simply by our own immediate interests, most often very human ones. And we will end up trying to put Mary at our service, forgetting to put ourselves at her service and, through her, at the service of God.

On the contrary, if we are able to look at Mary herself, as she is, we will understand better why the Lord has given her to us and what she most

wants to give us: what will facilitate our lives as children of God, and what will best be able to make us faithful to the promises of our baptism, and so to her Son. Mary wants to teach us to seek “*first the Kingdom of God*”, and the rest “*will be given as well*” (Mt 6,33).

“*Our mother in the order of grace*” takes us as we are, and she does not forget “*the rest*”, that is our needs and our legitimate human desires, for ourselves and for others, beginning with those we love. We can, then, ask her very simply for what we believe to be good for them and for ourselves. And, if we truly put our trust in her, we will put ourselves in her hands.

Basically, to the extent that we are advancing in “*true devotion*”, Mary teaches us to pray and to live in the spirit of the “*Our Father*”, to put the order needed into our preoccupations; she thus leads us towards true “*disinterestedness*”, that “*disinterestedness*” which will allow us to take to heart *the interests of Mary*, which are *the interests of God*. Now, these latter are of first importance, and, if they are not respected, “*human rights*” (beginning with our own) can never be respected either. What God wants, in fact, is our success, our happiness. So when we say: “*Hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come...*”, we are already asking for the happiness and the success of humanity.

If we manage to understand that, we will know that we can ask everything from God - and from Mary - for, in that case, all our requests will end with: “*Thy will be done*”, that is: if that is what you wish, because you are the one who knows what is really good, for me and for those I love.

So it is, too, with Mary: if we know her well and if we really love her, we have to get to the stage where we trust her to the point of wanting what she wants even more than what we desire. And, as Montfort tells us, we have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Mary, as the perfect Mother that she is, always wants what is truly best for her children, and she cannot let herself be beaten in generosity: “*Mary is charitable: she loves us as her children and servants. Let us offer everything to her and we will lose nothing by it...Mary is liberal: she returns more than we give her...*” (LEW 222).

Mary takes us as we are, that is, also, where we are, not so as to leave us there, but to make us go forward. So we should not be too saddened if we see that we still have a great deal to do to “*be emptied of self*”, and to reach more of a real disinterestedness. Our devotion to Mary, if lived out well, will help us little by little to make progress along this way.

Thus we will avoid the fault of the “*inconstant devotees... whose devotion to our Lady is practised in fits and starts. Sometimes they are fervent and sometimes they are lukewarm. Sometimes they appear ready to*



*do anything to please our Lady, and then shortly afterwards they have completely changed...*” (TD 101).

## **f) Towards the perfection of the spiritual life**

If we understand well what Montfort tells us of the qualities which “*devotion*” to Mary ought to have in order to be “*true*”, we see that it necessarily leads to a more fervent spiritual life, one which is more aware, and where the three Persons of the Trinity find their place.

Far from creating a barrier between her Son and ourselves, she makes us more and more like him, according to the mission he entrusted to her: “*God the Son wishes to form himself, and, in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in his members through his dear Mother...*” (TD 31), and she teaches us to be faithful to him. Far from making us forget the Father, she sends us back to him, since he “*wishes Mary to be the mother of his children until the end of time and so he says to her, ‘Dwell in Jacob’, that is to say, take up your abode permanently in my children, in my holy ones...*” (TD 29), and she leads us to real trust in him. Far from taking over the Holy Spirit’s place, she draws him to dwell in us: “*When the Holy Spirit, her spouse, finds Mary in a soul, he hastens there and enters fully into it. He gives himself generously to that soul according to the place it has given to his spouse...*” (TD 36).

## **2. THE “PRACTICES” OF A TRUE MARIAN DEVOTION**

Montfort makes a distinction between “*interior*” practices and “*exterior*” practices. For this latter category, it is good to bear in mind this remark: “*...I call (them) exterior, not because they are performed without inner attention but because they have an exterior element as distinct from those which are purely interior*” (TD 226).

### **a) The interior practices**

*“There are several interior practices of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Here briefly are the main ones:*

(1) Honouring her, as the worthy Mother of God, by the cult of hyperdulia, that is, esteeming and honouring her more than all the other

saints as the masterpiece of grace and the foremost in holiness after Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

(2) Meditating on her virtues, her privileges and her actions.

(3) Contemplating her sublime dignity.

(4) Offering to her acts of love, praise and gratitude.

(5) Invoking her with a joyful heart.

(6) Offering ourselves to her and uniting ourselves to her..." (TD 115).

It is for each one to find the means and the opportunities to put this programme into action.

## **b) The exterior practices**

We have seen how Montfort was able to give them their rightful place. They should express *the interior attitude* which gives them their true value. We can certainly not accuse St. Louis Marie of being miserly regarding external manifestations of his Marian piety. Yet, he does not hesitate at certain times to issue counsels of moderation. This is what he says concerning those who, at certain times, load themselves with such practices, only to abandon them all later: "*It is better not to burden ourselves with a multitude of prayers and pious practices but rather adopt only a few and perform them with love and perseverance in spite of opposition from the devil, the world and the flesh*" (TD 101). According to the Gospel, in fact, the useless multiplication of external gestures and words can mask what is in reality an empty interior (Lk 20, 45-47; Mt 6,78).

Experience teaches us that it is difficult to believe, despite verbal protestations, in the reality of internal sentiments which never manifest themselves externally. Authentic love or friendship know how to use concrete gestures, small or broad as the occasion demands, to bear witness to their hidden depths. It is said: "*Gifts foster friendship*"; which is true provided they are born of friendship in the first place...

If our spiritual life is above all interior, it is not by that fact outside the ordinary laws of human psychology: our genuine love for Jesus and for Mary must give rise in us to the need to foster it, to make it grow and to express it by external gestures, which Montfort calls "*practices of devotion*"...

He provides us with a sample of the principal "*external practices*" of which he is aware (TD 116). And then he adds: "*The Holy Spirit has inspired saintly souls with other practices of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, all of which are conducive to holiness...*" (TD 117).

Vatican Council II for its part tells us that it “*admonishes all the sons of the Church that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin, be generously fostered, and that the practices and exercises of devotion towards her, recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries be highly esteemed*” (LG 67).

We must make a judicious choice of our “practices”. This is for each and every one to do, according to their needs, what attracts them, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But it is a good thing for all of us, and is also a “*mark*” of genuine devotees of Mary, to take account of the recommendations of the Magisterium.

Vatican Council II, and afterwards Pope Paul VI, have reminded us of the priority of the liturgy for celebrating and honouring Mary in union with her Son. While they recognise the full legitimacy of “*popular devotions of the Christian people... provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church*” (Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) 13), they insist on the fact that they must be as far as possible in line with the liturgy: “*these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonise with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them*” (SC 13; *Marialis Cultus* (MC) 31). The liturgy, in fact, and especially in its highest manifestation, the Eucharist, provides us with the spirit and the orientation for all Christian prayer.

Paul VI also insists on the fact that “*in the first place it is supremely fitting that exercises of piety directed towards the Virgin Mary should clearly express the Trinitarian and Christological note that is intrinsic and essential to them. Christian worship in fact is of itself worship offered to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, or, as the liturgy puts it, to the Father through Christ in the Spirit*” (MC 25).

Provided this essential condition is respected, worship may be addressed to the Blessed Virgin and the saints: “*From this point of view worship is rightly extended, though in a substantially different way, first and foremost and in a special manner, to the Mother of the Lord and then to the saints, in whom the Church proclaims the Paschal Mystery, for they have suffered with Christ and have been glorified with Him. In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon Him... Certainly genuine Christian piety has never failed to highlight the indissoluble link and essential relationship of the Virgin to the divine Saviour. Yet it seems to us particularly in conformity with the spiritual orientation of our time, which is dominated and absorbed by the ‘question of Christ,’ that in the expressions of devotion to the Virgin the Christological aspect should have particular prominence. It likewise seems to us fitting that these expressions of devotion*

*should reflect God's plan, which laid down 'with one single decree the origin of Mary and the Incarnation of the divine Wisdom.' This will without doubt contribute to making piety towards the Mother of Jesus more solid, and to making it an effective instrument for attaining to full 'knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself' ...*” (MC 25).

As can be seen, this text is very much in the same line as what Montfort told us concerning the essential bond between Mary and her Son first of all, and also concerning the fact that Marian devotion must in the end lead to Christ, and through him, to the Father, in the Spirit (cf. TD 61). We are not being unfaithful to him, but on the contrary we are extending and enriching his thought, when we take account of the recommendations of the Council and of Pope Paul VI in choosing, among all the possible practices of Marian devotion, without any narrowness of spirit, those which harmonise best with the liturgy and lead us to it, particularly when it is a matter of prayers or celebrations.

Among the external practices, there are two which Pope Paul VI recommends in a special way: the *Angelus* and the Rosary. And what he says of these brings us back very easily to context in which Montfort asks us to live “*true devotion*”, that is, in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation.

## CONCLUSION

### LIVING “THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF THE LIFE OF DISCIPLES OF CHRIST”

If we set ourselves to cultivate, as we should, this “*true devotion*” to Mary, then we come gradually to live, as it were, “*in the presence of Mary*”, and to allow ourselves to be educated by her. She can only teach us to follow her Son, to be faithful to our baptism, and so to our “*vocation*” to be children of God called to share in his holiness and his glory.

Respecting this reality, willed by God, is what Pope John Paul II calls “*the Marian dimension of the life of Christ's disciples*” (*Redemptoris Mater* (RM) 45). This expression would certainly have pleased Montfort, for it expresses very well what he wanted us to understand: Mary belongs necessarily in our Christian life because she is our Mother. So we must take account of this in consciously deepening, more and more, our filial attitude towards her.

As John Paul II tells us, there exists between Mary and each one of us a very strong personal relationship: *“Of the essence of motherhood is the fact that it concerns the person. Motherhood always establishes a unique and unrepeatable relationship between two people: between mother and child and between child and mother... In the light of this fact it becomes easier to understand why in Christ's testament on Golgotha his Mother's new motherhood is expressed in the singular, in reference to one man: ‘Behold your son.’”* (RM 45).

And our response should be: the offering of ourselves to Mary: *“...All of this can be included in the word ‘entrusting.’ Such entrusting is the response to a person's love, and in particular to the love of a mother. The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of Christ, which began with the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, ‘welcomes’ the Mother of Christ ‘into his own home’ and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say, into his human and Christian ‘I’: he ‘took her to his own home.’ Thus the Christian seeks to be taken into that ‘maternal charity’ with which the Redeemer's Mother ‘cares for the brethren of her Son, in whose birth and development she co-operates’ in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ's Spirit... This filial relationship, this self-entrusting of a child to its mother, not only has **its beginning in Christ** but can also be said to be definitively **directed towards him...**”* (RM 45-46).

This page from John Paul II tells us clearly to what attitude, and to whom, *“true devotion”*, as Montfort has presented it to us, must lead us. This is a whole life-programme of Christian life with Mary. But St. Louis Marie has still more to teach us: a *“secret”* for going faster and further along this Marian road of union with Christ. He calls this secret *“the perfect practice of true devotion”*. Now we will set out to discover it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED

*"I have taken her for my own"* (TD 179; cf. 144, 216, 266; SM 66) For Montfort, the first "model" we should adopt in our life of filial dependence on Mary is undoubtedly Jesus himself, eternal and incarnate Wisdom. In second place is John, the beloved disciple, whom St Louis Marie proposes as an example, as, in response to the Word of Jesus: *"This is your Mother", "he took Mary for his own"* (TD 179). What does this expression mean? We must notice that it is not a question, properly speaking, for the disciple, of taking possession of Mary, but, on the contrary, of welcoming her into his life as a Mother who has all power over him, and of putting himself, in a filial manner, at her complete disposition. It is about receiving Mary from the hands and from the Heart of Jesus as he gives her to us, fully allowing her to accomplish her mission in us, with us, and also through us. For Montfort, this is another way of saying, what ought to be our total consecration and the life of dependence which must follow this, linking them directly to the solemn declaration of Jesus on the Cross. It is, in fact, to accord its full weight to the spiritual maternity of Mary and to draw from this the furthest consequences for the life of one who wishes to be a true disciple of Jesus.

We know that the spiritual teaching of Montfort which allows him to arrive at this life of dependence on Mary so as to depend more on Christ, is well-founded. But what value should we accord to his use of this Gospel text? In other words, does this text really have the meaning he gives it? Our answer calls for a distinction. In fact, the work of certain modern exegetes has led them to propose the following translation of Jn 19,27: *"From that time onwards, the disciple counted her among his own"*, that is, he received Mary among those things which belonged to him as truly his, in other words which were necessary for him to be a true disciple. Without ascribing to Montfort an almost miraculous ability to anticipate the work and results of modern exegesis, it suffices to note that his spiritual intuition, relying on sure doctrine, let him read this text of John with an exceptional depth: the gift which Jesus made gave us in his Mother must touch the very heart of our life as disciples, for the mission and action of Mary are necessary for us to live as such. Our response must be to welcome this gift, this treasure which Jesus shares with us. And modern exegesis permits us to give Montfort's intuition a new power today.

Nevertheless, we must add a qualification: St. Louis Marie says (in the original French): *"for all my good"* (TD 179) or *"for all my goods"* (TD 216), and not simply *"among my own"*. And it is true that Mary is not the only "good" that Jesus leaves to us that we might be truly his disciples and be able to live as such. This shows us that Montfort is not working like a scientific exegete, but like a spiritual exegete who pushes to its limits his own intuition. And, truly, within his spiritual way, it is easy to see that here he is completely true to himself. For him, in fact (and he is right in this), among those good things given us by Jesus, Mary shines forth with a sense of universality which is proper to her. Far from taking away from the importance and even the necessity of the other gifts made to us by Jesus (the sacraments, the Church...), Mary is the one who helps us to welcome them and use them to the full; in the mind of Montfort, to take Mary *"for one's own"* means to welcome, with her, *everything* that Jesus gives us, and everything he asks of us. We rediscover here quite simply the radicalism, and the evangelical absolutism of Montfort, at the heart of his Marian way which is totally directed towards Christ.

# Part II

## The “perfect practice” of true devotion

### Chapter One

#### *Montfort’s Secret*

#### **1. A “MARIAN DEVOTION” WHICH AFFECTS THE WHOLE OF LIFE**

The “practices of devotion” are means to support and give growth to our spiritual life... right up to its perfection: permanent union with God. Just like our purely human life, the spiritual life has several essential aspects, of which every particular “spirituality” must take account. This is what the Montfortian way does, as is witnessed by the inventory which Montfort draws up and which we are now going to examine a little more closely.

*“Having read nearly every book on devotion to the Blessed Virgin and talked to the most saintly and learned people of the day, I can now state with conviction that I have never known or heard of any devotion to our Lady which is comparable to the one I am going to speak of. No other devotion calls for more sacrifices for God, none empties us more completely of self and self-love, none keeps us more firmly in the grace of God and the grace of God in us. No other devotion unites us more perfectly and more easily to Jesus. Finally no devotion gives more glory to God, is more sanctifying for ourselves or more helpful to our neighbour” (TD 118).*

It is worth picking out the various elements.

## **a) A gift of oneself to God**

*“No other devotion calls for more sacrifices for God.”* The term “*sacrifice*”, in Montfort’s vocabulary, often means a gift, an offering of oneself, which, it is true, involves a real sense of renunciation which is difficult and painful for human nature.<sup>1</sup> When he speaks of a person who “*sacrifices himself*”, the expression has the sense of “*consecration of oneself*”, with the added nuance of renunciation. We might paraphrase it in this way: “*No other devotion calls for more of a gift of oneself, more of a consecration of oneself and of all one possesses, whatever the cost.*” Already, then, Montfort is indicating that this “practice” is going to involve us in that gift and total consecration of ourselves to God, which is the aim of our lives as baptised persons.

## **b) A renunciation of oneself according to the Gospel**

*“...none empties us more completely of self and self-love.”* To offer ourselves, we must be capable of being detached from ourselves, of “*renouncing self*”. This is a necessary condition of which the Gospel reminds us forcefully: “*If anyone wants to be a disciple of mine, let him renounce himself...*” (Mt 16.24). Selfishness, self-love, and all the evil that sin has left in us, are opposed to the gift of ourselves to which, nevertheless, we must come. “*renouncing self*” is therefore also “*emptying ourselves of all the evil that is in us.*” This is “*conversion*” according to the Gospel, which always has to be deepened, and which is one of the aspects of a Christian life which is trying to be fervent.

Montfort spoke a great deal of this necessity, which is for him the third basic truth concerning “*true devotion*” to the Blessed Virgin. Already, he is announcing here that he will reveal to us a *secret* “*in the spiritual life... which enable(s) us to perform works rapidly, smoothly and with facility. Such works are, for example, emptying ourselves of self-love, filling ourselves with God, and attaining perfection*” (TD 82).

## **c) A practice which ensures fidelity**

*“...none keeps us more firmly in the grace of God and the grace of God in us.”* How are we to be sure of our constancy in the efforts required, of our perseverance in fidelity, above all when, at certain times, we are bound to come up against greater difficulties, or when the impression that all our efforts seem to be leading nowhere threatens to plunge us into weariness or discouragement?



Montfort tells us that “*It is very difficult, considering our weakness and frailty, to keep the graces and treasures we have received from God*” (TD 87); and we know he is not mistaken in this. He also tells us that this is one of the reasons why we have such need of Mary. Now, he tells us that his “secret” is the most effective antidote to all the dangers which threaten our fidelity.

#### **d) Towards union with God**

“*No other devotion unites us more perfectly and more easily to Jesus.*” Here we are again referred back to the first of the basic truths concerning “*true devotion*” (TD 61-67), which is at the heart of baptismal life: union with Christ, who through the gift of his Spirit makes us live with his life, and enables us to share in the “sentiments” he has for the Father and for our brothers. “*I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me,*” said St. Paul (Gal 2,20), expressing in a few words the ideal which should be that of every Christian, and so ours. Montfort tells us that he can show us the most perfect and the easiest way to get there; we can have confidence in him, because he himself reached holiness in putting this into practice.

#### **e) For the glory of God, our own good and the good of our brothers**

“*...no devotion gives more glory to God, is more sanctifying for ourselves or more helpful to our neighbour.*”

“*The glory of God...*”! The Bible speaks of it often, and, in the liturgy, the Church asks us to sing this glory in many different ways. To what extent are we concerned about acting and living “*for the glory of God*”? Montfort, like all the saints, has a real sense of God and of his greatness, and, because he loves him above all things, he has a passion for his glory. In this he is following the example of Jesus Christ, the teacher *par excellence* of the spiritual life, and of Mary, “*the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples*” (MC 35): by their whole lives, they gave “*glory to God*”.<sup>2</sup> Like them, St. Louis Marie lived for this, and he tried to get others to share in his passion. So he asked the members of the Institutes that he founded to make this glory a rule of life<sup>3</sup>; he asked the same of those who would follow his spiritual way.

He knows that this is not very easy, and that we are often much more preoccupied with our own interests than with this “*noble end*”: “*Scarcely anyone works for that noble end, in spite of the obligation to do so, either*

*because men do not know where God's greatest glory is to be found or because they do not desire it*" (TD 151). And yet, in reality it is a matter of our spiritual equilibrium.

But who are those who procure the glory of God? Those who do the will of the father, even if they are not aware of it. All the same, it is better to know it, and, thanks to the way proposed to us by Montfort, Mary will help us in this.

And what is the will of the Father? "*The glory of God is a man fully alive,*" said St. Irenaeus, immediately adding: "*and for man, life is to see God*". The man who is fully alive is the one who succeeds in living according to God, the one who, even here below, lives by God, and walks always towards the vision proposed to him. We proclaim the glory of God to the extent of our holiness. If the "practice" Montfort proposes allows us to acquire holiness and to cause it to grow in ourselves and in our brothers, then it makes us sing the glory of God. And this is the case, because it is "*sanctifying for ourselves*" and "*helpful to our neighbour.*"

## **2. WHAT THIS PRACTICE CONSISTS IN**

This **perfect** practice "*consists in surrendering oneself in the manner of a slave to Mary, and to Jesus through her, and then performing all our actions with Mary, in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary*" (SM 28; cf. 43). This text is very clear. For Montfort, two elements are required: the act of consecration of oneself, and what he calls "*the interior practice*" in the *Secret of Mary* or "*interior practices*" in the *Treatise on True Devotion*. This second aspect is just as important as the first and, by the same title as the first, is part of the "*perfect practice of true devotion*". In fact, to try to do "*everything THROUGH MARY, WITH MARY, IN MARY, and FOR MARY, in order to do it more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, and for Jesus*" (TD 257), provides the way of integrating into daily life, little by little, the "*plan*" of total belonging and permanent dependence which is at the heart of the consecration. Without the "*interior practice*" put effectively into action, the act of consecration runs the great risk of having no future, and the end which Montfort wants us to aim for cannot be attained.<sup>4</sup> We will see this clearly when we come to the explanation of this practice.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CONSECRATION / TO CONSECRATE / TO CONSECRATE ONESELF

In common parlance, **to consecrate oneself** means simply to devote oneself **with a particular intensity to a task or to someone**. Thus we will say of a mother that she consecrates herself to her children, or of a doctor that he consecrates himself to his patients, or a researcher to his research. We should note that, even when used in a purely profane context, the term always has a positive sense, and no doubt this is due to its religious origins.

In its original sense, in fact, “consecration” means that a person or a thing is marked out in such a way that he/she/it is reserved for God, because made to share in some particular way in his holiness, in his “sacred” character. This is why, in the strictest sense, only God can “consecrate”, that is, give a sharing in what he is, communicate something of his holiness. Our first and basic consecration is brought about in our baptism, when Christ takes possession of us to make us share in what belongs to his holy humanity, which itself is fully consecrated through the Spirit. At that moment, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, consecrated us.

But how can we say that “we consecrate ourselves” to God? How can St. Louis Marie ask us to consecrate ourselves to Jesus through the hands of Mary? Quite simply because the Lord treats us as responsible people. The gift he gave us in consecrating us, sharing with us a part of his richness, calls for a response on our part. This will be first of all the conscious acceptance of the gift of God and its use in order to attain the end it allows us to reach. “I consecrate myself,” therefore, means that, recognising what the love of the Lord has done in me, I affirm my intention to take account of this and live by its consequences. Since the first consecration comes from God, my response as well can only return to him. In the strict sense, then, a consecration of oneself can only be made to God (and Jesus Christ is God), and involves, in a more or less explicit manner, a certain absolute character in the offering of oneself: all consecration in the strict sense, leans towards a total gift of oneself.

It is true that, even in the religious field, use has sometimes weakened the power of the word, so much so that it is used to say simply that we wish to take account of the particular mission confided to someone by the Lord, or that we put ourselves at his disposal or under his protection. The content of a gift of oneself cannot always be the same, when we are speaking to God or to one of his creatures. Thus, when we use “consecration” for an act of self-offering which ends with Mary, it must be very clear that the word does not have the same meaning as when this act is addressed to Christ. That is why some think that, despite the well-founded usage of the term, it would be better to avoid speaking of consecration to Mary.

St. Louis Marie de Montfort is very clear: the consecration he is asking for has an absolute, radical character; it must be a “perfect” renewal of the vows and promises of baptism; it must go to the limit in the gift of oneself. Under these conditions, it can only be addressed definitively to Christ. However, let us not forget that according to Montfort, this consecration of oneself is perfect precisely because it passes “*through the hands of Mary*”. To take account of all these elements, and to avoid any obscurity, it is better, when speaking of the Montfortian consecration, to say: *consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through Mary, or by the hands of Mary*. And this is just what St Louis Marie himself recommended (cf. TD 126).

## Chapter Two

### *The perfect Consecration of oneself to Jesus through Mary*

#### 1. THE ACT OF CONSECRATION

*“As all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and consecrates us most completely to Jesus”* (TD 120). There is no escaping the logic of this argument. But, then, what is this “devotion”, that is, this way of giving oneself, devoting oneself to the Lord, which enables us to attain perfectly the aim of the Christian life?

*“Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus”* (TD 120).

Montfort has already convinced us that Mary, as God willed, brings us back to Jesus: *“Lord, you are always with Mary and Mary is always with you. She can never be without you because then she would cease to be what she is. She is so completely transformed into you by grace that she no longer lives, she no longer exists, because you alone, dear Jesus, live and reign in her more perfectly than in all the angels and saints... So intimately is she united to you that it would be easier to separate light from the sun, and heat from the fire. I go further, it would even be easier to separate all the angels and saints from you than Mary; for she loves you ardently, and glorifies you more perfectly than all your other creatures put together”* (TD 63).

It follows that Mary *“is not like other creatures who tend rather to lead us away from God than towards him, if we are over-attached to them. Mary's strongest inclination is to unite us to Jesus, her Son...”* (TD 75). If friends of God, such as Montfort and so many others, have had this passionate desire to lead us to Jesus, to help us to know and love Jesus, what, then, must be said of Mary?

St. Louis Marie is right: the more we succeed in seeing Mary as he himself was able to contemplate her, in the light of a living faith and in the experience of her loving presence, the better disposed we will be to abandon ourselves to her without reserve, that she might lead us to Jesus.

For this is where we have to get to: *“That is why perfect consecration to Jesus is but a perfect and complete consecration of oneself to the Blessed Virgin, which is the devotion I teach; or in other words, it is the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism”* (TD 120). If Mary has nothing more urgent to do than to bring to Jesus whatever is given her, then, the more we give ourselves to her, the more we will attain to Jesus. With the logic of the saints, Montfort will therefore ask us to try **to go to the limit** in giving ourselves to Mary, so as to belong totally to Jesus. He has already explained for us that this is the only way to succeed fully in our lives, to arrive at that holiness which, in his love for us, God proposes to us, and towards which we promised to tend by the vows and promises of baptism.

## 2. WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE CONSECRATION

For Montfort, the manner of giving oneself without reserve is expressed in the word “consecration”.

### The text

St. Louis Marie goes into minute detail on what we must offer: *“This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give: (1) Our body with its senses and members; (2) Our soul with its faculties; (3) Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future; (4) Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future. In other words, we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life as well as everything we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory in heaven. This we do without any reservation, not even of a penny, a hair, or the smallest good deed. And we give for all eternity without claiming or expecting, in return for our offering and our service, any other reward than the honour of belonging to our Lord through Mary and in Mary, even though our Mother were not - as in fact she always is - the most generous and appreciative of all God's creatures”* (TD 121).

## **The meaning of this text**

This fundamental text claims our complete attention. With the radicalism of the saints, Montfort flings us in one throw right up to the most extreme point of evangelical exigencies: the total, absolute and definitive gift of ourselves to Christ, without the smallest exception in any field whatever. On top of this, even if he does not actually use the word, we are dealing here with a “*contract*” in due legal form, where everything is detailed with great precision, in such a way as to leave us with no possibility of appeal.

If we look at this text more closely, we become aware that Montfort is right in saying that it is not possible to go any further. In fact, “*It follows then: (1) that by this devotion we give to Jesus all we can possibly give him... Indeed we give him far more than we do by other devotions which require us to give only part of our time, some of our good works or acts of atonement and penances. In this devotion everything is given and consecrated, even the right to dispose freely of one's spiritual goods and the satisfactions earned by daily good works. This is not done even in religious orders...*” (TD 123). Montfort intends to say here that no religious institute, even the most demanding, asks for a similar gift or a similar abandonment in the profession of its members.

“(2) *It follows then that anyone who in this way consecrates and sacrifices himself voluntarily to Jesus through Mary may no longer dispose of the value of any of his good actions. All his sufferings, all his thoughts, words, and deeds belong to Mary. She can then dispose of them in accordance with the will of her Son and for his greater glory. This dependence, however, is without detriment to the duties of a person's present and future state of life...*” (TD 124). Here we are, faced with complete “*disinterestedness*”. We can see to what a degree of spiritual self-emptying Montfort wants to lead us. St. Paul said: “*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.*” Montfort would have us say: “*It is no longer I who want, but Mary who wants in me...*”, and, as Mary always wants what her Son wants, at base this is the same thing.

## **How these demands are to be understood**

If we understand well what is being proposed here, we can experience some fear: we hold on to ourselves, to our own ideas, our own plans and intentions. We love to give, and especially first of all to those near to us. In a sense, we are not wrong. This is not only a good thing; it is a necessity if we want to be ourselves, to take charge of our own lives, as the Lord asks of us,

since he wants us to be free and responsible. So, would it not be an unacceptable resignation on our part to give ourselves so totally to others?

If it were a matter of giving ourselves in this way to a creature, angel or man, we would have to reply, “yes” to this question. Not only could God not ask this of us; he forbids it. But, on the other hand, when it is he who is involved, it is another matter altogether. He is the Almighty, the Absolute, the Creator. Everything belongs to him, because everything comes from him; therefore he has a right to everything, absolutely everything, because we owe him everything. But he is the only to whom we can make such a gift. It is a question, in fact, of an act of “*latría*”, that is, an act of adoration in the strict sense, due to God and to “*God alone*”. For anyone else, it would be “*idolatry*”...

But we must not forget that “*God is love*”. If he asks us to try to come to this total gift of ourselves, it is definitely for our greater good. And it is only in this way that we can truly be ourselves, reaching the fullness of our freedom.

When are we truly free? God created us for good. When we will what is evil, and fall voluntarily into sin, we do what we want, certainly, but we act against what is our true nature, and, by abusing our freedom, we destroy it. Sin makes us prisoners, slaves of evil. Jesus, chained up before Pilate who condemns him to death, is fully free, while his judge is a prisoner of his fear and his cowardice: he knows very well that he ought to free the innocent one brought before him, but he lacks the courage to do so, **he is not free to do what is good.**

We notice this every day: our life here below is a warfare, a daily struggle to advance towards this blossoming liberty of the children of God. We come back to the “*Our Father*”: “*‘Deliver us from evil’; then we will be able to will the good that you will, and your will shall be done; then we will move towards the total gift of ourselves, which you ask of us because this is the only way for us to be free and happy*”.

Finally it is a question of faith in the love of God for us.

## **Why go through Mary in this consecration?**

If it is only to God that we can give and abandon ourselves totally, what is Mary doing here? As perfect as she is, she remains a creature. Montfort knows this well. He is about to tell us that we can give ourselves totally to Mary, but only **on condition that** it is done so as to give ourselves in a better way to Christ: “*It follows that we consecrate ourselves at one and the same time to Mary and to Jesus. We give ourselves to Mary because*

*Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him. We give ourselves to Jesus because he is our last end. Since he is our Redeemer and our God we are indebted to him for all that we are”* (TD 125).

Here everything is magnificently put in place. We want to consecrate ourselves to Christ, and we can do it without any holding back, as we have said, because he is “*our Redeemer and our God*”, our “*last end*”. But nothing prevents us making this gift pass “*through Mary*”; on the contrary, this is what the Lord himself invites us to do. She is “*the perfect means...*”, chosen by Jesus, “*...to unite himself to us and unite us to him*” (TD 125). And, as Montfort has reminded us, Mary can keep nothing for herself, because she lives and acts only for her Son. Thus, **everything** we want to give to Christ **passes** through the hands of Mary, who has nothing more urgent to do than pass it on to its ultimate destination. Montfort has found here the means of giving to Mary her rightful place in his “*consecration*”, while retaining its radical and absolute character.

There is a delicate balance involved here, which we must be able to respect if we are to understand the thinking of St Louis Marie. For if we were to stop the gift at Mary, or if we were to think that it is made **in the same way** to both Jesus and Mary, it would no longer be possible to retain its absolute character without falling into an exaggeration which could easily be called “Mariolatry”: in fact, this would be equivalent to putting Mary on the same level as her Son, who is God.

Nobody consciously wants to come to this. But we must be careful about our manner of speaking, so as not to leave room for misunderstandings and so give rise to criticism<sup>1</sup>. This why it seems preferable today to use the expression: “Consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary”, when speaking of the Montfortian consecration, rather than “Consecration to Mary”<sup>2</sup>.

### **3. A PERFECT RENEWAL OF THE VOWS OF BAPTISM**

*“I have said that this devotion could rightly be called a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism”* (TD 126). We have seen already that “*true devotion*” to Mary is rooted in Baptism, and must lead to fidelity to one’s baptismal promises. It simply belongs, in fact, to the Christian life. We will come back to all this in “*the perfect practice of true*



*devotion”, but now taken to the limit regarding the possible consequences: “In holy baptism we do not give ourselves to Jesus explicitly through Mary, nor do we give him the value of our good actions. After baptism we remain entirely free either to apply that value to anyone we wish or keep it for ourselves. But by this consecration we give ourselves explicitly to Jesus through Mary’s hands and we include in our consecration the value of all our actions” (TD 126).*

Let us remember that we belong by right to Christ, our Creator and Redeemer; he too possession of us by the sacrament of Baptism, to give us a share in the riches which are to be found in him. He can share these riches with us to the extent that we live out this belonging to him, in love and thanksgiving. Our Christian life should be a continual advance towards the total gift of ourselves to Christ, so that he might make the power of his Spirit shine out in us without any obstacles. Montfort says to us: why don’t we set our course immediately for this radical belonging, since it is already present in our baptism? This is not explicitly formulated in the ordinary renewal of the vows and promises of baptism, but if we have grasped what the love of Christ is for us, this Christ who has loved his own “right to the end”, what is to stop us from wanting to respond by ourselves going, as far as we can, right to the end?

And why could we not also take to the limit the consequences of the maternal presence of Mary in our Christian lives? The more we agree to depend on her in the conduct of our lives, the more we will be living out our belonging to her Son. So we don’t need to be afraid of going too far. So, let us give ourselves totally to her, so as to give ourselves in a better way to Christ, and we will come in this way to a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of our baptism.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Chapter Three

## *The Interior Practice*

### 1. TO WHOM IS MONTFORT TALKING HERE?

It might be good to begin by dealing with a possible source of ambivalence. Montfort tells us, in fact: “...*here are some very sanctifying interior practices for those souls who feel called by the Holy Spirit to a high degree of perfection*” (TD 257). Must we draw the conclusion from this that he is addressing his words only to a privileged elite, and, therefore, we have little chance of being involved? This would be a mistake. In fact, the passages where St. Louis Marie makes it very clear that he wants to convince all Christians of good will, without exception, are too clear for this passage to contradict them<sup>1</sup>. So there must be another explanation.

Montfort is well aware that, even if what he is talking about is an “*easy, short, perfect and secure way*”, it will not be understood by all at first glance, and that not all will progress in it at the same pace. To each according to the grace given. There is a minimum of conditions which have to be met to be able to accept St. Louis Marie’s message. But these conditions are not beyond the capabilities of a Christian who has the faith and wants to live it, for whom the promises of baptism are a commitment to which he will try to be faithful, so as to respond to the love of Christ and to receive the good things he promises.

So who are the ones who will not be able to accept the message of Montfort, and who are those who will? He tells us himself: “*If any critic reading this should imagine that I am exaggerating or speaking from an excess of devotion, he has not, alas, understood what I have said. Either he is a carnal man who has no taste for the spiritual; or he is a worldly man who has cut himself off from the Holy Spirit; or he is a proud and critical man who ridicules and condemns anything he does not understand. But those who are born not of blood, nor of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God and Mary, understand and appreciate what I have to say. It is for them that I am writing*” (TD 180).

If you were among those people that Montfort speaks about, who are incapable of understanding it, you would no doubt have abandoned this book a long time ago. By your baptism, you were born of God and of Mary, you believe this, and you want to live out the consequences. Even if this desire is not yet strong enough, it is enough that you let yourself be convinced to try to go further. You are indeed among the “*privileged*”, not in the world’s sense, but in the realm of grace, since you have the good fortune to hear the message of Christ passed on by Montfort. Without leaving out any of the demands of the Gospel, it shows you a way which is simple and easy, that of Mary. The important thing is not to discover what degree of sanctity you are going to achieve; it is to know that you are called to it, and, in all trust and humility, to set out on the road.

## **2. IN WHAT THIS “INTERIOR PRACTICE” CONSISTS**

It “*may be expressed in four words, doing everything THROUGH MARY, WITH MARY, IN MARY, and FOR MARY, in order to do it more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, and for Jesus*” (TD 257)<sup>2</sup>.

We find again, in the “*interior practice*”, the same radicalism, the same will to give all, absolutely everything, as in the act of consecration. And, like this latter, it is completely oriented towards Jesus Christ, “*our Redeemer and our God*”, who therefore can receive this total gift of ourselves. It seeks to infuse our whole behaviour with a docility to Mary, so that our life may be truly that of a child of the Father, a true disciple of Christ who allows himself to be guided by his Spirit.

### **a) To do all one’s actions through Mary**

#### ***To be led by the spirit of Mary***

“*We must do everything through Mary, that is, we must obey her always and be led in all things by her spirit, which is the Holy Spirit of God. “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” says St. Paul (Rom 8,14). Those who are led by the spirit of Mary are children of Mary, and, consequently children of God, as we have already shown. Among the many servants of Mary only those who are truly and faithfully devoted to her are led by her spirit*” (TD 258).

To be led by the spirit of Mary is to try to see ourselves, others and events through her eyes. The spirit of Mary “*is the Holy Spirit of God*”, Montfort tells us. How are we to understand this statement? Here is the explanation: “*I have said that the spirit of Mary is the spirit of God because she was never led by her own spirit, but always by the spirit of God, who made himself master of her to such an extent that he became her very spirit. That is why St. Ambrose says, ‘May the soul of Mary be in each one of us to glorify the Lord. May the spirit of Mary be in each one of us to rejoice in God.’*” (TD 258). Not only does Mary not take the Spirit’s place in our regard, but she helps us to receive him and to be docile to him. Mary is so indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus, so “soaked” in him, that to see her, to find her, is to see and find him.

Iron is not fire, yet in red-hot iron, glowing with the brilliance of the fire and burning with its heat, it is the iron that we see and find. Mary is not the Spirit, but in reality we cannot encounter her without encountering him, present and at work in her. The Almighty and Loving Presence that dwelt in her from the first moment of her existence through the grace of the Immaculate Conception, that invaded her being with renewed fullness at the Annunciation, and that came upon her again to be shared with all the disciples gathered in the Upper Room, has not left her. Mary is the “Sanctuary” of the Holy Spirit, that is, the place of his presence, where we can always find him. She is his “*faithful and inseparable*” spouse (TD 36), of whom he wills to continue to have need so as to transform us spiritually into the image of Jesus, as he willed to have need of her so as to form him “*with her, in her and of her*” (TD 20).

To find the Spirit in Mary and through Mary, is to share in the sentiments he inspires in her and which she expressed in the *Magnificat*: thanksgiving to glorify the Lord, and the joy of knowing we are loved by him. So it is that Montfort can conclude: “*Happy is the man who follows the example of the good Jesuit Brother Rodriguez, who died a holy death, because he will be completely possessed and governed by the spirit of Mary, a spirit which is gentle yet strong, zealous yet prudent, humble yet courageous, pure yet fruitful*” (TD 258).

Once more, we must recognise that Montfort is right. But, once more also, we may be tempted to ask ourselves how the ideal which he proposes is possible for us. He does not hesitate to give us a reply, and this brings us back to a necessary effort we have to make, which we have already seen several times:

## ***To renounce oneself***

*“The person who wishes to be led by this spirit of Mary: 1) Should renounce his own spirit, his own views and his own will before doing anything, for example, before making meditation, celebrating or attending Mass, before Communion. For the darkness of our own spirit and the evil tendencies of our own will and actions, good as they may seem to us, would hinder the holy spirit of Mary were we to follow them” (TD 259).*

In so far as our spontaneous desires do not correspond with what Mary asks of us, it is evident that we must try to give them up, otherwise we will not be able to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Even this is not easy, in fact it is sometimes very painful, because we are invited to a real asceticism. But it is the rule of the Gospel: to put on the new man created in the Spirit, it is necessary that the old man which is tainted by sin should be put to death in us. In the same way that it is easier for a child to put up with a painful operation in the presence and with the encouragement of its mother, so for us, in the spiritual order, it will be easier if we know that Mary is with us.

This presence is all the more necessary when we have to try to go further. The practice suggested by Montfort would not merit the adjective “*perfect*” if it did not invite us to go to the limits of that “*disinterestedness*” called for by a “*genuine devotion*”. Our intentions and desires are not always bad or disordered, thank God. We must desire as intensely as possible the good to which we are called. But we are also capable of mixing in with these “*good intentions*” a certain amount of self-seeking. It would be more effective, in the effort to detach ourselves from all desire to possess, to try to want what Mary wants much more than what we ourselves want.

Let us understand this well: this “*disinterestedness*” does not lead to a sort of passivity or indifference; on the contrary, if we truly love Mary and her Son, then we will succeed in wanting what they want with an intensity and an ardour in proportion to our love.

## ***To lose and abandon oneself, in Mary***

It is in this sense that we need to understand what Montfort next says to us: “2) *We should give ourselves up to the spirit of Mary to be moved and directed as she wishes. We should place and leave ourselves in her virginal hands, like a tool in the hands of a craftsman or a lute in the hands of a good musician. We should cast ourselves into her like a stone thrown into the sea. This is done easily and quickly by a mere thought, a slight movement of the will or just a few words as, ‘I renounce myself and give myself to you, my*

*dear Mother.’ And even if we do not experience any emotional fervour in this spiritual encounter it is none the less real... ” (TD 259).*

Montfort is already showing us the means by which we will be able to live this abandonment into the hands of Mary: to turn towards her so as to meet, in faith, her gaze resting on us. This is possible at every moment, and Montfort is not the only one who says this.

Here we need to go back to what Vatican II told us concerning the attitude of Mary towards us today: *“By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth...” (LG 62).* Those who wish to live out the interior practice need only draw out the ultimate consequences of these few words. For they tell us that we are, at every moment, under the attentive and loving gaze of Mary. For his part, John Paul II has reminded us with insistence that a mother’s love reaches out to each of her children in a unique and altogether personal way, and of this Montfort is wholly convinced.

So it is possible for us, in faith and in fidelity to grace, to become each day a little more aware of this true presence of Mary in our lives, so as to read in her gaze on us what the Spirit of her Son asks of us. And we must make the effort to do this as often as possible: *“From time to time during an action and after it, we should renew this same act of offering and of union. The more we do so, the quicker we shall grow in holiness and the sooner we shall reach union with Christ, which necessarily follows upon union with Mary, since the spirit of Mary is the spirit of Jesus” (TD 259).*

It is easy to see that *“through Mary”* has to be applied to the whole of our lives, to all our decisions and actions, and how it can allow us to make more and more real in our daily lives the *“total gift”* of ourselves we made in our *“consecration”*.

## **b) To do all one’s actions with Mary**

*“We must do everything with Mary, that is to say, in all our actions we must look upon Mary, although a simple human being, as the perfect model of every virtue and perfection, fashioned by the Holy Spirit for us to imitate, as far as our limited capacity allows. In every action then we should consider how Mary performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place. For this reason, we must examine and meditate on the great virtues she practised during her life, especially: 1) her lively faith, by which she believed the angel’s word without the least hesitation, and believed faithfully and constantly even to the foot of the Cross on Calvary; 2) her deep humility, which made her prefer seclusion, maintain silence, submit to*

*every eventuality and put herself in the last place; 3) her truly divine purity, which never had and never will have its equal on this side of heaven; and so on for her other virtues” (TD 260).*

To find out what Mary expects of us, we can take for inspiration the example she herself gave us during her life on earth: that of a perfect faithfulness in the service of the Lord, with the strength of an unflinching faith, a humility which involves a forgetfulness of self to the point where she is totally available for the Lord, a purity so perfect that she can consecrate herself totally to him. Vatican II tells us this, too, when it presents Mary to us at the Annunciation: *“Thus the daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the word of God, became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself wholeheartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God” (LG 56).*

The viewpoint put forward here by the Council is wider than that of Montfort in the passage quoted above; but we can see in it how Mary is our model, especially *for making and living out our consecration*. First of all, by *“committing herself wholeheartedly ... to God's saving will”*, she indicates for us the royal way to follow: to try to make our own, a little like her and with her, the love with which God loves us and all our brothers and sisters; this is what Jesus came to teach us. Then, she shows us how to consecrate ourselves: committing ourselves, like her, as *“totally”* as possible, *“to the person and work of her Son”*, for we cannot do one without the other: to follow Jesus is to commit ourselves *“under and with him”* to *“serving the mystery of redemption”*.

To imitate Mary, we need to know how she lived on earth. Where the Gospel describes for us her reactions and attitudes, we must make the greatest effort to read and re-read, and to meditate on these events so that we are, as it were, soaked in them: knowing our Mother better, we will find it easier to be inspired by her example. But the task is above all to get to know here interior dispositions, for these are what we must try to reproduce, in our own circumstances, in our vocation, our state of life and our current situation. Pope Paul VI rightly remarked that *“the Virgin Mary has always been proposed to the faithful by the Church as an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led, and much less for the socio-cultural background in which she lived and which today scarcely exists anywhere. She is held up as an example to the faithful rather for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God (cf. Lk. 1:38), because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions.*

*She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All of this has a permanent and universal exemplary value” (MC 35).*

This is in fact the path Montfort takes in referring us directly to the “*virtues*” of Mary. It is on the spiritual level that we have to ask ourselves, when we are seeking enlightenment on some action to be performed, how “*Mary performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place.*” It is true that there are situations in which we may find ourselves from time to time where it is impossible to “*imagine*” Mary: situations arising from our weaknesses, our rejections or our falls. Yet it is at those very moments that we have most need to look to her, that she may help us to find the humility, confidence and strength which will get us out of them.

To finish, Montfort takes up again the image of the “*mould*”: “*Remember what I told you before, that Mary is the great, unique mould of God, designed to make living images of God at little expense and in a short time. Anyone who finds this mould and casts himself into it, is soon transformed into our Lord because it is the true likeness of him*” (TD 260). This image is a timely reminder to us that, even as we strive to imitate Mary, it is more important to let ourselves be formed by her than to want to achieve everything ourselves.

### **c) To do all one’s actions in Mary**

#### ***Mary, earthly paradise of the new Adam, Jesus Christ***

*“To understand this we must realise that the Blessed Virgin is the true earthly paradise of the new Adam and that the ancient paradise was only a symbol of her. There are in this earthly paradise untold riches, beauties, rarities and delights, which the new Adam, Jesus Christ, has left there. It is in this paradise that he ‘took his delights’ for nine months, worked his wonders and displayed his riches with the magnificence of God himself” (TD 261).*

The image of the “*earthly paradise*” applied to Mary occurs more than once in Montfort’s writings. It signifies for him that the Blessed Virgin is the privileged dwelling-place of Christ, the new Adam; foreseen and spiritually prepared to be a worthy Mother of God, she was incomparably enriched by the presence of Jesus, who took his delight in her.

Again, as always, it is to the mystery of the Incarnation that Montfort refers us, to enable us to discover the spiritual beauty of Mary, but also to help us to understand that it is in her that we can find the life which Jesus



came to share with us: *“In this earthly paradise grows the real Tree of Life which bore our Lord, the fruit of Life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which bore the Light of the world”* (TD 261). The comparisons are clear: in the ancient earthly paradise, there were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge; in the same way, we find them in the new paradise, Mary, who carried, like a fruit, Jesus, our life and our light. And it is always in her that we can find him.

Montfort spares no detail in describing the splendours of Mary’s inner being: *“In this divine place there are trees planted by the hand of God and watered by his divine unction which have borne and continue to bear fruit that is pleasing to him. There are flower-beds studded with a variety of beautiful flowers of virtue, diffusing a fragrance which delights even the angels. Here there are meadows verdant with hope, impregnable towers of fortitude, enchanting mansions of confidence and many other delights. Only the Holy Spirit can teach us the truths that these material objects symbolise.”*

It is abundantly clear that we are dealing here with the spiritual riches with which Mary was showered by God and which she brought to fruition: *“In this place the air is perfectly pure. There is no night but only the brilliant day of the sacred humanity, the resplendent, spotless sun of the Divinity, the blazing furnace of love, melting all the base metal thrown into it and changing it into gold. There the river of humility gushes forth from the soil, divides into four branches and irrigates the whole of this enchanted place. These branches are the four cardinal virtues”* (TD 261).

### ***Mary, location of the presence of God***

*“The Holy Spirit speaking through the Fathers of the Church, also calls our Lady the Eastern Gate, through which the High Priest, Jesus Christ, enters and goes out into the world. Through this gate he entered the world the first time and through this same gate he will come the second time. The Holy Spirit also calls her the Sanctuary of the Divinity, the Resting-Place of the Holy Spirit, the Throne of God, the City of God, the Altar of God, the Temple of God, the World of God. All these titles and expressions of praise are very real when related to the different wonders the Almighty worked in her and the graces which he bestowed on her. What wealth and what glory! What a joy and a privilege for us to enter and dwell in Mary, in whom almighty God has set up the throne of his supreme glory!”* (TD 262).

## *The difficulty in understanding Montfort*

Today, this language may appear somewhat outdated, and some would no doubt want to see a little more moderation in his enthusiasm. But, apart from the fact that Montfort finds these expressions in the Fathers of the Church, it must also be remembered that in fact he was more discreet than a number of his contemporaries.

There is another thing, too, which should make us reflect: if we have difficulty in following him, this may also arise from the fact that we are still far from knowing and loving Mary to the extent that knew and loved her, and particularly from living “*in Mary*” as he had managed to do. So, let us put our trust in him. In any case, he warns us of the difficulty: “*But how difficult it is for us to have the freedom, the ability and the light to enter such an exalted and holy place. This place is guarded not by a cherub, like the first earthly paradise, but by the Holy Spirit himself who has become its absolute Master. Referring to her, he says: “You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain.” Mary is enclosed. Mary is sealed. The unfortunate children of Adam and Eve driven from the earthly paradise, can enter this new paradise only by a special grace of the Holy Spirit which they have to merit*” (TD 263).

Is Montfort trying to discourage us here? Not at all. He has made it all too clear how close Mary is to us, to what extent she has been given to us, for him now to make her out as inaccessible. And then, why go to so much trouble to convince us and give us the desire to “live in Mary”, if it were only in the end to say that this is not for us?

But Montfort knows that what we have here is “*a grace*”, which we have to await from the Holy Spirit, while at the same time preparing ourselves to receive it. The best way of doing this is to make a start and persevere with “*through Mary*” and “*with Mary*”, which will bring us little by little to such a familiarity with her that, without even realising it, we will begin to live with the sense, often vague, but sometimes more conscious, of her motherly presence, of her union with us and our union with her. Then we will begin to live “*in Mary*” because we will have welcomed Mary “*in us*”.

Montfort himself achieved this in a permanent way. Listen to Canon Blain, who gives an account of this information confided to him by his friend in 1714: “*During the talk I had with him he told me that God had granted him a very special grace, which was the continual presence of Jesus and Mary in the depth of his soul.*”<sup>3</sup> If a person has “*the tree of life*” within themselves, then they possess also its fruit: Jesus. Montfort also confides to us his secret in the Hymn *The Devout Slave of Jesus in Mary*: “*Here is something you could never have believed: / I carry her in my midst, /*

*engraved in glorious strokes, / even if in the darkness of faith.”* (cf. C 77, v.15).

So let us do our best to live our life “*through Mary*” and “*with Mary*”, so as to come finally to live “*in her*”.

### ***Remaining in Mary***

*“When we have obtained this remarkable grace by our fidelity, we should be delighted to remain in Mary. We should rest there peacefully, rely on her confidently, hide ourselves there with safety, and abandon ourselves unconditionally to her, so that within her virginal bosom: 1) We may be nourished with the milk of her grace and her motherly compassion; 2) We may be delivered from all anxiety, fear and scruples; 3) We may be safeguarded from all our enemies, the devil, the world and sin which have never gained admittance there. That is why our Lady says that those who work in her will not sin, that is, those who dwell spiritually in our Lady will never commit serious sin; 4) We may be formed in our Lord and our Lord formed in us, because her womb is, as the early Fathers call it, the house of the divine secrets where Jesus and all the elect have been conceived...”* (TD 264; cf. TD 33).

Let us reflect on this text. This is not a dream, but a spiritual reality which ought to have a place in our lives. Here we find again some of St. Louis Marie’s favourite themes, starting with the very profound image of the maternal womb of Mary where we find life.

This is a spiritual image which must be understood in a spiritual way, as Jesus demanded of Nicodemus when he was explaining for him the necessity of being born again “*from on high*” and “*of the Spirit*” (Jn 3,1-12). Here, St Louis Marie does not mention the Spirit, but it is clear that his presence and his action are implied, since he is associated with Mary in bringing us to birth and causing us to grow as children of the Father, in the image of Jesus Christ: “*...the more he finds Mary his dear and inseparable spouse in a soul the more powerful and effective he becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul and that soul in Jesus Christ*” (TD 20).

It is an image which in no way calls us to some sort of infantile regression, but on the contrary invites us to become more and more adult and responsible in Jesus Christ, for “*it is in the bosom of Mary that people who are young grow mature in enlightenment, in holiness, in experience and in wisdom, and in a short time reach the fullness of the age of Christ*” (TD 156). In looking at the level reached by St. Louis Marie de Montfort, we can see that what he says is true.

#### **d) To do all one's actions for Mary**

Here St Louis Marie raises for us an important aspect of our attitude towards Mary. She is, as he says over and over again, a “means” which God chose to use to give us Jesus, and a “means” he wants us to use in our turn to be united with him. In this he gives us to understand that Mary cannot be our ultimate end.

Mary is a person, and God is the first to deal with her as such. It is he who shows us how we must see Mary and behave towards her: with immense respect and profound love. If, like St. Louis Marie, we draw our inspiration from the example of the Trinity, and more especially of Jesus, then we will understand that we need to act also “for Mary” and that, in doing so, we will be acting in a better way for God.

*“Finally, we must do everything for Mary. Since we have given ourselves completely to her service, it is only right that we should do everything for her as if we were her personal servant and slave. This does not mean that we take her for the ultimate end of our service for Jesus alone is our ultimate end. But we take Mary for our proximate end, our mysterious intermediary and the easiest way of reaching him” (TD 265).*

The duty of acting for Mary, then, follows from the “consecration” which we have made to Jesus through her, by which we have made it our object to serve her and to take to heart her interests. St. Louis Marie reminds us that everything has to bring us to Christ, our “*ultimate end*”, but also that Mary is our “*proximate end*” and our “*mysterious intermediary*”<sup>4</sup>, our “*easiest way of reaching*” Jesus.

*“Like every good servant and slave we must not remain idle, but, relying on her protection, we should undertake and carry out great things for our noble Queen. We must defend her privileges when they are questioned and uphold her good name when it is under attack. We must attract everyone, if possible, to her service and to this true and sound devotion. We must speak up and denounce those who distort devotion to her by outraging her Son, and at the same time we must apply ourselves to spreading this true devotion. As a reward for these little services, we should expect nothing in return save the honour of belonging to such a loveable Queen and the joy of being united through her to Jesus, her Son, by a bond that is indissoluble in time and in eternity” (TD 265).*

If we truly understand all that we owe to Mary, how can we not be filled to overflowing with thanks to her? How can we not want to make her known and loved? And if we have really seen that the way pointed out to us by Montfort puts us at the service of Christ through her, then we will be

enthusiastic, not only to follow her, but also to make her know as much as possible in our own circumstances, in line with the vow made by Montfort, who asks us to continue his work into our own day, for the glory of Mary and the Kingdom of Christ.

Today more than ever, we need to pay attention to this idea of doing all our actions “for Mary”, so as to act more effectively “for Jesus”. The importance of this will become clear in all its relevance to today in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSION

The interior practice proposed to us by Montfort to enable us to make the total gift of ourselves to Christ through the hands of Mary a reality and a developing thing, is in itself very simple.

For, what are we talking about? Learning to live consciously under the gaze of Mary, our Mother. Now, we do this already, at least at certain times. We know well enough how to think of her and have recourse to her when we are unhappy or in a mess, in other words when we need her, and also at other times, certainly, including moments when we want to thank her. It is a question of making this attitude of confident recourse to Mary as permanent a reality as possible, in all circumstances and in all things. Then we will learn little by little how to read in her gaze resting on us what she said to the servants at the marriage feast of Cana: “*Do whatever my Son tells you*”; and she adds, “*for that is where you will find what is best for you, and I am with you to help you to accept it and carry it out*”.

We have to come to the point, little by little, where we can no longer move out of the awareness, at least in a vague sense, of this loving presence of Mary in our lives, our concerns, our desires, our joys and sufferings. As a very small child “senses” instinctively the presence of its mother, we need, spiritually speaking, to feel the presence of Mary. And, again, just as the very small child, noticing the absence of its mother, frets and looks about to find her, we must come to feel that something is missing when we lose the sense of this presence of Mary. Montfort warns us that this does not happen in a sensible way, but more deeply at the level of faith; but this is none the less real, and no doubt, at certain privileged moments, we have already experienced something of it.

It is simple, but not always easy. It may be that we are not all that keen to come face to face with the gaze of Mary, because we are not anxious to read there what she asks of us, which will go against our current pet project,

to which we are weak enough to be attached. It is difficult to do certain things under the gaze of a mother, when you really love her and know very well that she will be opposed to it; but it is just as difficult to refuse what she asks directly. Also, we might well be tempted to turn away our gaze from her, at least for a time, so as to be less worried about doing what we want rather than what she wants.

\* \* \* \* \*

## SLAVE / SLAVERY

Father de Montfort's vocabulary is, as is quite normal, influenced by his own age. Words and expressions which, it would seem, posed no difficulty for his contemporaries, might surprise us today, be misunderstood, might even shock people now. This is the case, for example, for "slave" and "slavery". In Montfort's day, these terms did not refer to a past which had changed, but to a reality still present in what has been called "the slave trade". It is perfectly natural for us to be scandalised today by abuses which at one time were considered normal. But that does not give us an excuse for not seeking to discover what Montfort meant when he spoke of slaves and slavery. Here we need to make several remarks.

First of all, it should be noted that, to justify what he says, St. Louis Marie does not have recourse to the situation of his own day, but quite simply to the vocabulary of the Bible (cf. TD 68-72). So, before rejecting it, it might well be asked whether, in so doing, we might be running the risk of rejecting along with it an important element of Revelation itself. As creatures, we have everything - absolutely everything - from God; because we are saved, "redeemed" by him, we belong to him by a new title. But, on both heads, it is love, and love alone, which is at the source of the action of God, and not any personal interest of any sort. This means that all that God asks of us is for our good and aimed at our genuine success. It follows that our response can be none other than a response of love, and that implies our freedom - a fully voluntary commitment.

Nevertheless, it remains true, as always when we speak of divine realities and of our relationship to God, in words taken from human experience (and how are we to do otherwise if we are to be understood?), that there is an unavoidable discrepancy between our world from where this vocabulary comes, and the world of God to which it is applied. Here, what we are trying to express by the terms "slave" and "slavery", is the reality of a radical, absolute dependence. But it has to be noted at the same time that this dependence on God, essentially good because it is based on the freedom of love, is of a completely different sort to that which is involved in slavery among humans, which itself is based on unjustifiable constraint. Montfort distinguishes very well between these, and directs our attention to a slavery of love.

But there is one difficulty which may remain. St. Paul asserts that, thanks to the Spirit which is given to us, we are no longer slaves, but children: "*So you are not a slave anymore, but a son*" (Gal 4,7). But, as is so often the case, we must not take a single passage from the Scripture and make it absolute. On the one hand, the context clearly shows that the liberation of which St. Paul is speaking here is concerned precisely with whatever is opposed to the liberty of the children of God or limits it. On the other hand, in other passages, he shows that being a child, not only is not in conflict with a total dependence in love on him who is our Father, but on the contrary demands this, and that this wholly voluntary dependence is the condition for and the expression of genuine liberty (1 Cor 7,22ff), as Jesus himself has shown us (Phil 2,8). It would therefore be a mistake to rely on St. Paul (and on the liberty of the Gospel in general) to refute the assertions of Montfort.

Yet, despite these explanation, there may well be some who remain reluctant, or even refuse, to use these words "slave" and "slavery", because they continue to evoke for them an inhuman and degrading situation. What is important, then, is to find (and this is not easy) other expressions which do full justice to that radical dependence, fully consented to, which is the goal to which Montfort wishes to guide us. Experience shows, in any case, that those who make real progress in the Montfortian way, coming to a better understanding through experience of what Montfort is trying to say, gradually leave behind any reservations and end up by accepting his vocabulary.

## Chapter Four

### *The Apostolic Dimension of the Life of a Consecrated Person*

*“It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world”* (TD 1). This opening sentence of the Treatise on True Devotion brings us from the outset face to face with the mission of Mary: to make her Son known and loved, so that he might share his salvation with everyone; in other words to establish his Reign.

For Montfort, Mary seems to be the first missionary of the Trinity, and more especially of her Son; in this, she is clearly the type and model of the Church. If *“true devotion”* to Mary makes us share in her spirit, then it will lead us to share her concern for the kingdom of her Son; in other words, it has of necessity an apostolic dimension. And this will be found with a particular intensity in those who have consecrated themselves totally to Jesus through the hands of Mary and who wish to depend on her throughout their lives so as to be more dependent on Jesus.

## 1. THE TEACHING OF MONTFORT... AND OF THE MAGISTERIUM TODAY

### a) What Montfort tells us

#### *Through the first two Fundamental Truths*

This apostolic or “missionary” dimension is at the heart of the first two *“fundamental truths”* of true devotion to Mary, as they are presented in the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

The first of these truths: *“Christ must be the ultimate end of all devotions”*, reminds us that everything in our lives must lead towards Christ: *“We labour, as St. Paul says, only to make all men perfect in Jesus Christ”* (TD 61).



The obligation on baptised persons to devote themselves as far as they can to the apostolate is an immediate consequence of the second fundamental truth: “*We belong to Jesus and Mary as their slaves*” (TD 68). It follows that we must serve them in everything and with all our strength. The dependence in love to which our guide is leading us is nothing to do with passive submission; on the contrary it must flow and blossom into a voluntary and generous “*service*”. Those who are consecrated to Jesus through Mary are led to take *their* interests to heart to the extent that they become their whole reason for living.

Now what is it that Mary wants, if not that Jesus should reign in everything and in all people? And what does Jesus want, if not that the Name of the Father might be held holy, that his Kingdom should come, that his will might be done? And this will is that all human being should be saved. If we understand well the first two fundamental truths, we will see that they must lead us necessarily and immediately to share in the desire for the salvation of all her children which is found in the heart of Mary, because her desire is spiritually identical to that of her Son. “*True devotion*” to Mary leads necessarily to Jesus, the unique source of our salvation, and places us at the service of Jesus and of Mary so that this salvation may be spread as much as possible around us. This is the very law of baptism which must make apostles of all Christians.

### ***The Apostles of the Latter Times***

Montfort has a vision of history stretching forward towards the second coming of Jesus, already begun in his Church, and so in us; this definitive coming will be fully manifested at the time of the Return of the Lord, which we call for in each celebration of the Eucharist. We must work towards this coming of Christ, and this is the meaning of all apostolic commitment.

According to Montfort’s vision (which is indeed the Gospel vision), the closer we move to this glorious Return of the Lord, which will bring about the irreversible defeat of the forces of evil, the more determinedly will these same forces engage in a desperate fight to place obstacles in the way of the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Mary, who is involved in a unique way in this coming of her Son in us and in our world, is therefore implicated in this struggle. As her contribution to it, she helps to form those whom Montfort calls the “*apostles of the latter times*”. This is how he describes them: “*What will they be like, these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary? They will be ministers of the Lord who, like a flaming fire, will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love. They will become, in Mary’s powerful hands, like sharp arrows, with which she will transfix her enemies. They will be as the children of Levi, thoroughly purified by the fire of great*

*tribulations and closely joined to God. They will carry the gold of love in their heart, the frankincense of prayer in their mind and the myrrh of mortification in their body. They will bring to the poor and lowly everywhere the sweet fragrance of Jesus, but they will bring the odour of death to the great, the rich and the proud of this world*” (TD 56). Those who, *“by the grace and light of the Holy Spirit, adopt the interior and perfect practice”* (TD 55) of *“true devotion”* will be these apostles of the latter times. While it is true that Montfort is thinking, here and in the following numbers, of missionary priests<sup>1</sup>, it is no twisting of his thought to apply these texts full of fire to all those priests, religious and lay-people who live out their Montfortian consecration by committing themselves generously to the apostolate<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Motives for, and effects of the perfect practice of True Devotion***

A number of the motives for, and effects of the perfect practice of true devotion emphasise its apostolic dimension.

*“By it we give ourselves completely to God”*: this is the first motive proposed by St. Louis Marie to invite us to follow him in the path of consecration to Jesus through Mary: *“We can conceive of no higher calling than that of being in the service of God and we believe that the least of God's servants is richer, stronger, and nobler than any earthly monarch who does not serve God. How rich and strong and noble then must the good and faithful servant be, who serves God as unreservedly and as completely as he possibly can!”* (TD 135). To serve the Father: is this not to put oneself at his disposal that his Kingdom may come? To serve Christ: is it not to work with him that the fire of love which he came to kindle on the earth may be spread everywhere? This is what Mary invites us to.

The fourth motive, that it is an excellent means of giving glory to God, leads in the same direction, since God finds his glory in saving human beings and showing forth his mercy.

The seventh motive, that it is of great benefit to our neighbour, leads St. Louis Marie to develop his thoughts a little: *“We give our consent that all we have already acquired or will acquire until death should be used in accordance with our Lady's will for the conversion of sinners or the deliverance of souls from Purgatory... To appreciate the excellence of this motive we must understand what a wonderful thing it is to convert a sinner or to deliver a soul from Purgatory. It is an infinite good, greater than the creation of heaven and earth, since it gives a soul the possession of God”* (TD 171-172).

Montfort does not have in mind here any precise apostolic activities; his aim is simply to show the spiritual effectiveness of the life of a person who is faithful to his or her consecration, and who brings forth these fruits “*by doing hardly anything more than what we are obliged to do by our state of life*” (TD 171). But the enthusiastic missionary we know cannot restrict himself to that. How can he not invite us to share in his zeal?

In any case, as we have seen, he promises us that his spiritual way faithfully followed will have as one of its effects to gain for us a share in Mary's faith, “*a courageous faith which inspires you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and the salvation of souls*” (TD 214). We only need to think of all that Montfort himself undertook and carried out to see that this promise of his is not illusory.

It is not difficult, either, to extend the thinking of our guide to discover the concrete apostolic implications which must, in the normal course of events, flow out, for one who is consecrated, from those other “*marvellous effects*” he mentions, which are:

- the *communication of the soul and spirit of Mary* (cf. TD 217): how could we share in the spirit of Mary without being inspired to commit ourselves at the side of her Son to the work of salvation, as she herself was committed?

- the *transformation of souls in Mary into the likeness of Jesus Christ* (cf. TD 218): how could we be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ without experiencing along with him a thirst for the salvation of our brothers and sisters?

- the assurance of contributing in this way to *the greater glory of Jesus Christ* (cf. TD 222-225), and this glory is precisely the salvation efficaciously given by the power of the Cross.

### ***The apostolic commitment contained in and coming through the interior practice***

Here again, it is sufficient to draw out the consequences of Montfort's assertions. To do one's actions “*through Mary*”, “*with Mary*” and “*in Mary*”, is of necessity to try to make one's own her desires and her feelings, so as to share more in those of Jesus; so we notice immediately their love for our brothers and sisters, a love which is not prevented by anything at all from leading them to salvation.

With the phrase “*for Mary*”, as we have seen, St. Louis Marie places us directly in the concrete context of an apostolate which must make of every consecrated person an apostle of “*true devotion*” to Mary and the

Montfortian way of putting this into practice. So the prayers of Montfort the missionary will be realised more and more as time goes by: *“I feel more than ever inspired to believe and expect the complete fulfilment of the desire that is deeply engraved on my heart and what I have prayed to God for over many years, namely, that in the near or distant future the Blessed Virgin will have more children, servants and slaves of love than ever before, and that through them Jesus, my dear Lord, will reign more than ever in the hearts of men”* (TD 113). To make Mary known and loved, is to make Jesus known and loved, and so to work for the coming of his Kingdom.

## **b) The Teaching of the Magisterium Today**

### ***Vatican II***

The Council presents Mary as a *“generous associate”* in the work of the Redeemer *“in a singular way”* (LG 61).

#### *At the Annunciation*

This is how Vatican II describes the attitude of Mary at the Annunciation: *“Thus the daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the word of God, became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself wholeheartedly and impeded by no sin to God's saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God”* (LG 56). This text deserves to hold our attention, for, in a style which is certainly different from Montfort's, it throws light on a certain number of points which find an echo in his thought.

- *“...committing herself wholeheartedly ... to God's saving will...”*. Here we have one aspect of what is contained in the “Yes” of Mary: she shares intensely, without any reservations, all the desires of the Lord when he asks her to become the Mother of Jesus, the Saviour, and what he desires is our salvation. Here we have a magnificent definition of what ought to be the genuine *“apostolic spirit”*: the more a person manages to embrace the salvific will of God, that is, to make his or her own the saving love of the three persons of the Trinity, the more they are pushed towards their brothers and sisters to share these riches with them.

- *“...she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son...”*. That Mary should consecrate herself entirely to the person of her Son is normal. But the immediate consequence is that she devotes herself in the same way to his *“work”*. To love the Saviour and

give oneself to him, is to accept to be committed to his service to co-operate “*under Him and with Him*” in “*the mystery of redemption*”.

Thus we find in Mary the perfect example of the missionary spirit and of effective commitment, in a full consecration of oneself to the service of the Lord Jesus and of his brothers and sisters. That is to say that those who give themselves totally to Mary and promise to live through her and with her will only bring their idea to true and full realisation if they let themselves be drawn by her into those apostolic tasks which are possible for them.

### *At the Cross*

Mary pronounces this “yes” to salvation throughout her pilgrimage of faith at the side of her Son, and, with an exceptional intensity, at the supreme “Hour” of the Cross: “*Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her*” (LG 58).

That is how far Mary's love for her Son and for us has led her! And that is what God asked of her, for the presence of Mary at the Cross and her consent, in the purest of faith, a faith totally stripped bare and crucified, belongs to the “*divine plan*”. Her sharing in the saving love of God for us, as it is demonstrated in the gift of himself made by Jesus on the Cross, here reaches an intensity and a fruitfulness which are extraordinary: this is the moment chosen by her Son to proclaim her spiritual maternity, and to entrust to her the “disciple” who represents each and every one of us. In fact the Council continues: “*Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross as a mother to his disciple, with these words: ‘Woman, behold thy son’*”.

We have been able to see how well Montfort has grasped the link between the Cross, as a sign and an expression of love, and apostolic fruitfulness. The Council shows us this in Mary, and rightly says: “*In her life the Virgin has been a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated*” (LG 65).

All the baptised must have the intention of taking part “*in the Church's apostolic mission*” according to their own abilities, including accepting that share of the cross which Jesus asks them to carry at certain times. This becomes an even more urgent duty for those who have

consecrated themselves to Jesus through Mary, because she can only lead them into that gift of herself to which she consented at the foot of the Cross.

For the Council, as for Montfort, Mary is not only a “*model*”, but also “*a mother to us in the order of grace*” (LG 61), and she brings the co-operation of her motherly love to the birth and upbringing of the brothers and sisters of her first-born (cf. LG 63). To accept to let oneself be thus formed by Mary, as those who consecrate themselves do, is to learn from her to be committed at her side so that the salvation brought by her Son might continue to invade our world.

### ***From Paul VI to John Paul II***

“*The star of evangelisation*”: such was the beautiful title Paul VI gave to Mary: “*On the morning of Pentecost, (Mary) presided in prayer at the beginning of evangelisation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; may she shine forth as the star of that constantly renewed evangelisation which the Church, in obedience to the command of the Lord, must promote and accomplish especially in these days, so difficult but so full of hope.*”<sup>3</sup> Father Caillé, S.M.M., made this comment on this title: “*Mary is the Star which shines only to reflect, in her person as well as in her life, the Morning Star who is Christ the evangeliser. As a simple human being, she is this Star of evangelisation who invites each of us to reflect, like her, the light of the Christ-Light, to let ourselves be evangelised by him so as to be able in the same way to carry the light of the Gospel to others.*”<sup>4</sup>

John Paul II, for his part, insists on the need for a “new evangelisation”, that is, a new start in an evangelising effort seeking to inject and re-inject into the world in which we live the fundamental values of Christianity, and he never misses an opportunity to emphasise the place which Mary can and should hold in this:

“*With humility and magnanimity you were the ‘handmaid of the Lord’; give us your unreserved willingness for service to God and the salvation of the world. Open our hearts to the great anticipation of the kingdom of God and of the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole of creation. Your mother’s heart is ever mindful of the many dangers and evils which threaten to overpower men and women in our time. At the same time your heart also takes notice of the many initiatives undertaken for good, the great yearning for values, and the progress achieved in bringing forth the abundant fruits of salvation.*

“*O Virgin full of courage, may your spiritual strength and trust in God inspire us, so that we might know how to overcome all the obstacles that we encounter in accomplishing our mission. Teach us to treat the affairs of*

*the world with a real sense of Christian responsibility and a joyful hope of the coming of God's kingdom, and of a new heavens and a new earth.*

*“You who were gathered in prayer with the apostles in the Cenacle, awaiting the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, implore His renewed outpouring on all the faithful, men and women alike, so that they might more fully respond to their vocation and mission, as branches engrafted to the true vine, called to bear much fruit for the life of the world.*

*“O Virgin Mother, guide and sustain us so that we might always live as true sons and daughters of the Church of your Son. Enable us to do our part in helping to establish on earth the civilisation of truth and love, as God wills it, for His glory.”<sup>5</sup>*

These reminders are valid for everyone, but those who have consecrated themselves to Jesus through Mary will be especially anxious to take the greatest note of the.

## **2. HOW TO LIVE OUT THE APOSTOLIC DIMENSION OF THE CONSECRATION**

### **a) A spiritual acceptance of responsibility**

All who have made the consecration must stand up and be counted here. Montfort has made it very clear that the gift of all our goods into the hands of Mary cannot lead to a sort of passive indifference. Quite the contrary: the more our love for Jesus and Mary grows, the more we are obliged to take up their cause, and the better we can understand that they send us towards our brothers and sisters, whether they be close or far away.

A first thing is possible for everyone: prayer and offerings. It is quite normal for consecrated persons to make their own the wider intentions of the Church for evangelisation, while at the same time remaining very attentive to the needs in this line which they can see closer to home, like Mary, attentive at the marriage feast at Cana. We can pray with great power and confidence, after the example of St Louis Marie asking the Lord with vehemence for missionary priests for his *Company of Mary* in the *Prayer for Missionaries*. There is nothing in that which is opposed to our gift of self, since what we are asking is quite simply that the Kingdom of God might come more and more among us, and we simply leave it in Mary's hands to decide how this should be.

As consecrated people we must also remember that everything in our lives should be offered up for our own salvation and that of our brothers and sisters. This is true of our joys, our moments of happiness, our successes; and perhaps we do not think of that enough. It is also true of our trials, our sufferings and our crosses, and here we certainly need courage.

It often happens that those who can no longer give themselves to an active apostolate or service of others, because of age or sickness, or any other reason, begin to have a certain feeling of uselessness, and they suffer from this. If the Lord should ask you today to share in the work of salvation in this way, don't refuse him and, with Mary, offer up this suffering. The same can be said of any trial, physical or moral. God cannot ask anything useless of us. Those who are consecrated in Montfort's way, who have given themselves totally to Christ through Mary, must come to understand this and to offer up everything *"for the glory of God and the salvation of the world."*

## **b) The sign of fraternal love**

Evangelisation calls for the proclamation of the Good News in every possible way, but it calls for something else as well. For, all those words, and today the use of all those modern technologies which have become available, will bear no real fruit unless they are supported by the sign *par excellence* of a witness to fraternal charity.

Jesus has told us this and repeated it again and again: *"May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me"* (Jn 17,21). This unity which Jesus calls on us to show so that the world may believe in him, can only be the fruit of love lived out in an effective way: *"Just as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples"* (Jn 13,34-35). If we forget this fundamental commandment, we may well be making propaganda or publicity, but we will not be bearing witness. Montfort knew this well, and called in his prayers for people consecrated to Jesus through Mary, who would be ready *"to go wherever the Holy Spirit calls them, filled as they are with the resolve to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Wherever they preach, they will leave behind them nothing but the gold of love, which is the fulfilment of the whole law"* (TD 58).

All the baptised are called to give this sign of love and so to underpin the evangelising work of the Church and of the communities to which they belong. The Montfortian consecration should help them to have a more vivid awareness of this; moreover, it supplies means which are particularly effective in leading those who are faithful to it to live it out in a



progressively better way. Modelling oneself on Mary, letting oneself be invaded by the spirit which animated her and which is no other than “*the Holy Spirit of God*” (cf. TD 258), trying to perform every action as Mary “*performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place*” (TD 260), necessarily leads to trying to put into the whole of our lives at least a little of that love with which she lived. Without doing anything spectacular, those who set themselves to live out their consecration become, in this way, very simply, right where God has placed them, some of those witnesses which the Church needs to carry out its work of evangelisation. It is both a stimulant and a joy to them to know that everything they do takes on this apostolic dimension.

### **c) Concrete apostolic commitments**

Everyone who has made the consecration will make it their duty to choose, according to their abilities, those apostolic commitments that they can take up, that is, those which are compatible with the obligations of their family or professional situation, etc. To settle on their choice, each one must be attentive to the various signs given to determine what Mary is asking of them. An attraction towards such and such a form of commitment might be a positive indication: the Lord does not always ask us to choose what goes against our wishes! But this attraction must be set against other elements: the real needs of the human or church communities of which we form a part, the urgent need to safeguard such and such a mission... To do what Mary asks, therefore, those who have made the consecration must take the trouble to look for the signs in their lives which are given them to help them to discover it.

### **d) In a “Church” spirit**

The baptised know that they are part of a whole, members of the Body of Christ, of the Church. They must therefore have a concern for the good of the whole, and take account of the general guidelines for the apostolate given by those whom Christ has placed at the head of his Church and those responsible for the various communities to which they belong. What is true for all the baptised who want to live up to the demands of their baptism, is clearly true, and we might say all the more so, for those who have made their Montfortian consecration.

“*True devotion*” to Mary leads us, in fact, to know the Church always better, to love her and be deeply faithful to her. While St. Louis Marie has not pronounced great discourses on this theme, he has done more and better

than that: he has shown us by his life what is genuine loyalty to the Church. He would certainly have rejoiced at the proclamation of Mary as “*Mother of the Church*”, as made by Pope Paul VI, that is, rooting it in the mystery of the Incarnation and stating that this title “*belongs to the essence of true devotion to Mary*”<sup>6</sup>. How could we pretend to honour Mary and be faithful to her in truth, while going against this Church of which she is the Mother? To detach ourselves from the Church of her Son, is in fact to detach ourselves also from her. Mary can only remind us of what Christ said to his Apostles and, in their persons, to the Pope and the bishops: “*Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you, rejects me...*” (Lk 10,16).

For those consecrated to Mary, then, their gift of themselves to her is a further reason for witnessing in all circumstances to a great “Church” spirit, and especially when it is a question of apostolic commitments. They must realise, in fact, that these commitments, to be made as Mary wants them to be, must be seen as being within the mission which Christ entrusted to his Church. Montfort’s example shows that this attitude of obedience to the Church, well understood, is in no way contrary to initiatives or great apostolic designs.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **A POSSIBILITY IN ANY WALK OF LIFE**

One of the peculiarities of the perfect practice of true devotion, as presented by Montfort, is, as we have seen, that it is at one with the Christian life as such. It makes us aware of the ideal present in our baptism, which is to reach a state of total belonging to Christ and of permanent loyalty to him; it leads us to envisage this ideal, not as a far-off possibility, but as something demanded by our living today in so far as we are capable of it. This is what we do by the act of “*total consecration of ourselves to Christ through the hands of Mary*” and by taking on the “*interior practice*”, in the hope that the Lord and Mary will help us each day to progress in it.

At root, it is very simple - which is not to say that it will always be easy for us! In fact, there is practically no extra obligation to add to what is involved in our “*state of life*”, our situation today or tomorrow. Or rather there are only two: to want to give ourselves totally to Jesus by the act of consecration, and then to do all that is demanded of us “*through Mary, with Mary...*”. If we look closely at it, we see that it is a matter of an attitude of mind to be acquired rather than of new obligations to be taken on. In reality, experience shows that this way, if followed faithfully, leads to a unification, and, far from complicating things, it simplifies them and makes them easier.

## Chapter Five

### *Motives for making the Consecration, and Effects of the Consecration*

The effects normally produced by putting the consecration into practice are in themselves powerful motives for making it. We will therefore present motives and effects together.

#### **1. TWO IMPORTANT “MOTIVES” RECOMMENDING THE CONSECRATION**

##### **a) This devotion causes us to imitate the example given by Jesus Christ and by God himself (TD 139-143)**

Here we are at the heart of Montfortian spirituality in its Marian aspect, that is in as much as it accords to Mary in the entire life of the baptised person the exceptional place St. Louis Marie has described. This presence of Mary colours all the other aspects, as we have seen, especially with the interior practice.

To be genuine, any spirituality worthy of the name must embrace all those elements which are necessary for an authentic Christian life, yet will place emphasis on one particular aspect from among the manifold riches of Christ, an aspect which is sufficiently important to throw its light on the whole. Such is the case of poverty for Franciscan spirituality. Thus we must find in Jesus the attitude which we are going to seek to imitate.

##### *The example of Christ*

Montfort tells us that it is Jesus himself who gives us the example of total dependence on Mary. He proposes for us a gospel way, the foundation of a genuine spirituality. This is how he explains it.

*“Our good Master stooped to enclose himself in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a captive but loving slave, and to make himself subject to her*

*for thirty years. As I said earlier, the human mind is bewildered when it reflects seriously upon this conduct of Incarnate Wisdom. He did not choose to give himself in a direct manner to the human race though he could easily have done so. He chose to come through the Virgin Mary. Thus he did not come into the world independently of others in the flower of his manhood, but he came as a frail little child dependent on the care and attention of his Mother” (TD 139).*

“*The human mind is bewildered...*”. This coming of Eternal Wisdom to us through the Incarnation is in fact enough to plunge us into an admiring stupefaction.

Montfort was very sensitive to the wonderful “*abasement*” of Christ in the Incarnation, and he loves to contemplate his dependence on Mary which is part and parcel of this mystery: when he lived in the womb of his mother, Jesus depended on her in everything and for everything, as all children do. But, while other children have no choice about this condition, it is a different matter for Eternal Wisdom incarnate, Jesus Christ: he **willed** this dependence on Mary, “*a captive but loving slave*”<sup>1</sup>. Jesus was subject to Mary for the whole of his human upbringing and education, and even if she is not the only one involved here (Joseph in particular had his role to play, and it was a great role), she is nevertheless the most concerned.

To emphasise the completely voluntary nature of this subjection, St. Louis Marie relies on a remark by St. Luke who, in speaking of the attitude of Jesus towards Mary and Joseph, concludes the story of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple in this way: “*(he) lived under their authority*”. It is true that there is something surprising about these words: Jesus has just clearly claimed his own independence when it is a question of his mission. So St. Louis Marie continues: “*Consumed with the desire to give glory to God, his Father, and save the human race, he saw no better or shorter way to do so than by submitting completely to Mary. He did this not just for the first eight, ten or fifteen years of his life like other children, but for thirty years. He gave more glory to God, his Father, during all those years of submission and dependence than he would have given by spending them working miracles, preaching far and wide, and converting all mankind. Otherwise he would have done all these things. What immeasurable glory then do we give to God when, following the example of Jesus, we submit to Mary!*” (TD 139). For Montfort, this dependence of Jesus on Mary also concerns his mission, for through her he gave glory to his Father and saved mankind<sup>2</sup>.

To end, St. Louis Marie challenges us: “*With such a convincing and well-known example before us, can we be so foolish as to believe that there*

*is a better and shorter way of giving God glory than by submitting ourselves to Mary, as Jesus did?” (TD 139).*

And let us not forget these words of the text of the Consecration: *“Accept, gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery to honour and imitate the obedience which eternal Wisdom willingly chose to have towards you, his Mother” (LEW 226).*

Thus it is Jesus himself who is our first and greatest model.

### ***The example of the Trinity***

In addition to the example of Jesus in his humanity, there is the example of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, who, by their attitude towards Mary, invite us to leave it to her: *“Let me remind you again of the dependence shown by the three divine Persons on our Blessed Lady. Theirs is the example which fully justifies our dependence on her. The Father gave and still gives his Son only through her. He raises children for himself only through her. He dispenses his graces to us only through her. God the Son was prepared for mankind in general by her alone. Mary, in union with the Holy Spirit, still conceives him and brings him forth daily. It is through her alone that the Son distributes his merits and virtues. The Holy Spirit formed Jesus only through her, and he forms the members of the Mystical Body and dispenses his gifts and his favours through her. With such a compelling example of the three divine Persons before us, we would be extremely perverse to ignore her and not consecrate ourselves to her. Indeed we would be blind if we did not see the need for Mary in approaching God and making our total offering to him” (TD 140).*

### **b) This devotion leads to union with our Lord (TD 152-168)**

Union with Christ, so as to live by his life, is the necessary goal sought by any spirituality. And indeed such is the case with the Montfortian way, thanks to Mary, *“because Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him” (TD 125).*

Montfort writes: *“This devotion is a smooth, short, perfect and sure way of attaining union with our Lord, in which Christian perfection consists” (TD 152).*

Why? Because Mary is the path Jesus willed to borrow to come to us. It is again imitation of him when we in our turn take this path to go to him. Montfort lists all the advantages of this way.

## *A smooth way*

*“It is the path which Jesus Christ opened up in coming to us and in which there is no obstruction to prevent us reaching him”* (TD 152). There is no obstacle in Mary herself, that is true. But this does not mean that we are not going to encounter the cross, which is part and parcel of the following of Christ: *“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and come after me”* (Mt 16,24). Montfort would not be Montfort if he forgot that. But, how does he see the cross?

First of all, and we must never forget this, the cross of Jesus is, for St. Louis Marie as for the Gospel, the greatest sign of his love, a love which goes to the limit in giving itself. It is not suffering which **first and foremost** characterises the cross of Jesus: without love, which gives it its whole meaning and value, it would lead nowhere. To want suffering **for itself** is against nature. In *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, Montfort explains why *“the Cross is precious”*, and one of the reasons he gives is: *“because when it is well carried it is the source, the food and the proof of love”* (LEW 176). The triumph of the cross of Christ, is the triumph of Love, and love, which is stronger than death, leads to glory.

To follow Jesus in his glory, we have to go by way of the Cross, for *“the disciple is not above his Master”*: *“Make no mistake about it; since incarnate Wisdom had to enter heaven by the Cross, you also must enter by the same way. No matter which way you turn, says the Imitation of Christ, you will always find the Cross. Like the elect you may take it up rightly, with patience and cheerfulness out of love for God; or else like the reprobate you may carry it impatiently and unwillingly...”* (LEW 180).

This is where Mary is a precious help for us: she helps us to discover the meaning of the Cross and to carry it as it should be carried. And that changes many things: on Mary’s road, Montfort tells us, *“it is true...we have hard battles to fight and serious obstacles to overcome, but Mary, our Mother and Queen, stays close to her faithful servants. She is always at hand to brighten their darkness, clear away their doubts, strengthen them in their fears, sustain them in their combats and trials. Truly, in comparison with other ways, this virgin road to Jesus is a path of roses and sweet delights”* (TD 152).

St. Louis Marie is speaking here from experience: he had met the cross in many ways, but, thanks to Mary, he had understood it so well that he had found his joy in it. It is almost a description of his own life that he is giving when he offers us the following lines: *“Why is it then, a servant of Mary might ask, that devoted servants of this good Mother are called upon to suffer much more than those who serve her less generously? They are*

*opposed, persecuted, slandered, and treated with intolerance. They may also have to walk in interior darkness and through spiritual deserts without being given from heaven a single drop of the dew of consolation. If this devotion to the Blessed Virgin makes the path to Jesus smoother, how can we explain why Mary's loyal servants are so ill-treated?*

*“I reply that it is quite true that the most faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin, being her greatest favourites, receive from her the best graces and favours from heaven, which are crosses. But I maintain too that these servants of Mary bear their crosses with greater ease and gain more merit and glory. What could check another's progress a thousand times over, or possibly bring about his downfall, does not balk them at all, but even helps them on their way. For this good Mother, filled with the grace and unction of the Holy Spirit, dips all the crosses she prepares for them in the honey of her maternal sweetness and the unction of pure love... I believe that anyone who wishes to be devout and live piously in Jesus will suffer persecution and will have a daily cross to carry. But he will never manage to carry a heavy cross, or carry it joyfully and perseveringly, without a trusting devotion to our Lady, who is the very sweetness of the cross...” (TD 153-154).*

We have to decide what we want: either to remain in our mediocrity, trying to protect ourselves and escape the cross of Christ, in which case we will still experience trials and suffering, all the more painful to bear as we will not see their meaning; or else to follow Jesus Christ, offering him our collaboration for our own salvation and that of our brothers and sisters, in which case we will try to carry with love that portion of the cross which he will ask us to accept. Let us entrust ourselves to Mary; with her, everything will become possible and, as Montfort tells us, much easier. She has such experience in this area! She followed her Son to the foot of the Cross, out of love for him and for us.

### ***A short way***

With Mary, we make progress more quickly and more surely towards our goal, union with Jesus: *“We advance more in a brief period of submission to Mary and dependence on her than in whole years of self-will and self-reliance...” (TD 155).*

Once again, Montfort invokes the example of Jesus himself: *“Why do you think our Lord spent only a few years here on earth and nearly all of them in submission and obedience to his Mother? The reason is that ‘attaining perfection in a short time, he lived a long time’... because he lived in complete submission to his Mother and in union with her, which*

*obedience to his Father required” (TD 156). If Christ himself willed to take the road of filial dependence on his Mother Mary so as to fulfil the will of his Father, what more efficacious or more rapid way could we hope to find?*

### ***A perfect way***

*“This devotion is a perfect way to reach our Lord and be united to him, for Mary is the most perfect and the most holy of all creatures, and Jesus, who came to us in a perfect manner, chose no other road for his great and wonderful journey” (TD 157). If this way is perfect for Jesus, it is the same for us: “Show me a new road to our Lord, pave it with all the merits of the saints, adorn it with their heroic virtues, illuminate and enhance it with the splendour and beauty of the angels, have all the angels and saints there to guide and protect those who wish to follow it. Give me such a road and truly, truly, I boldly say - and I am telling the truth - that instead of this road, perfect though it be, I would still choose the immaculate way of Mary...” (TD 158).*

### ***A sure way***

*“This devotion is a safe means of going to Jesus Christ, because it is Mary's role to lead us safely to her Son; just as it is the role of our Lord to lead us to the eternal Father. Those who are spiritually-minded should not fall into the error of thinking that Mary hinders our union with God. How could this possibly happen? How could Mary, who found grace with God for everyone in general and each one in particular, prevent a soul from obtaining the supreme grace of union with him? Is it possible that she who was so completely filled with grace to overflowing, so united to Christ and transformed in God that it became necessary for him to be made flesh in her, should prevent a soul from being perfectly united to him?” (TD 164).*

*“It is Mary's role to lead us safely to her Son...”. What a beautiful definition of Mary's mission! The more we belong to Mary and are willing to depend on her, the more she will help us to reach Jesus so as to be united with him.*



## **2. TWO MARVELLOUS EFFECTS OF THIS “PRACTICE”**

### **a) Mary gives us a share in her faith**

#### ***Faith, the source and root of our justification***

Right at the start of our spiritual life, there is faith. In his first Letter, St. John describes Christians as those who believe in the love of God for them: “*We ourselves have known and put our faith in God’s love towards ourselves. God is love*” (1 Jn 4,16). What we are concerned with is the love of God for us, as it is revealed in Jesus. And the faith that St. John is talking about, is a *living faith*, the source within ourselves of a full godly life, for it leads to hope and is expressed in charity.

#### ***Faith, the gift of God and human response***

“It is faith that saves...”. This popular saying does not have, for the most part, the deep meaning we should attach to it. Yes, it is true faith that enables us to receive salvation. And, just as salvation is from God alone, so the faith that saves must come from him. It is the Spirit of Jesus who brings it to birth in us. If we can say: “*I have faith*”, it is not in the sense that we are the owners of it, but simply because we have had the good fortune to have received it and to have kept it as a gift, a “grace”.

It is true that the Lord asks us to welcome this gift and make it bear fruit: the life of faith must be, on our part, a thankful “*response*” which tends towards the love of God. May we be able to say, like St. Paul, “*I am what I am by God’s grace, and the grace that he gave me has not been fruitless*” (1 Cor 15,10). Mary, even more than Paul, could have made this “*profession of faith*”. And here we have Montfort promising that she is ready to share her faith with us: “*Mary will share her faith with you. Her faith on earth was stronger than that of all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints*” (TD 214).

#### ***Mary and our faith***

The quality of our spiritual life takes its measure from the quality of our faith, of which Mary is the perfect model. The Gospel, and, in our own day, the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI and John Paul II, all tell us this at every possible opportunity<sup>3</sup>. But Mary is not only a model; she is a Mother,

and co-operates as such in the “*generation and formation*” of the brothers and sisters of Jesus, her “*first born*” (cf. LG 63). As our life as children of God begins through faith, it is this faith that she will seek first of all to instil in us, in union with the Holy Spirit.

Montfort is well aware that Mary now has no need of faith: “*Now that she is reigning in heaven she no longer has this faith, since she sees everything clearly in God by the light of glory. However, with the consent of almighty God she did not lose it when entering heaven. She has preserved it for her faithful servants in the Church militant*” (TD 214). “She has preserved it”, in the sense that she has the power to give us something of that perfect faith by which she lived while on earth<sup>4</sup>. The more we live out our consecration, the more docile we will be towards her motherly activity, and the more she will be able to pour into us the riches of faith: “*Therefore the more you gain the friendship of this noble Queen and faithful Virgin the more you will be inspired by faith in your daily life*” (TD 214).

St. Louis Marie goes on to paint a magnificent picture of Mary’s faith. In doing so, he also tells us what his own faith was like, and it would be possible to draw a spiritual portrait of himself using this text.

- “*(a pure faith<sup>5</sup> which) will cause you to depend less upon sensible and extraordinary feelings...*” “*A pure faith*”, that is, a faith which is founded only on God, which is content with the “*signs*” he wants to give us, without seeking the “*sensible*” or “*extraordinary*”.

Montfort is warning us here about an unreasonable desire for marvels, which at base is a sign of a certain worrying and of a faith which is still very imperfect. When we read the Gospels correctly, we see that Mary lived out her faith, for the most part, in the banality of an undisturbed everyday reality. On the day of the Annunciation, certainly, she received from God the essential message of the Incarnation, of which she is the most important and necessary witness; afterwards, however, she was content to welcome in simplicity and faithfulness those indications which the Lord sent her way through others: Elizabeth at the Visitation, the shepherds at Christmas, Simeon at the Presentation, Joseph for the flight into Egypt...; as well as those which came through her daily life. John Paul II reminds us forcefully that Mary, during the hidden life, was “*in constant contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man*”, but “*only in faith and through faith*” (RM 17). If anyone has had to live in “*the darkness of faith*” , it is she!

But she allowed nothing to be lost which could nourish her faith, for the present moment or for the future, and, while full enlightenment was not given her all of a sudden, she was able to wait: “*As for Mary, she treasured*

*all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (Lk 2,19). She can teach us “*the patience of faith*”.

- “*a lively faith animated by love enabling you to do everything from no other motive than that of pure love...*” To act for the love of God and through love of God, in genuine disinterestedness: what a dream is that! Yet Mary achieved it, and she is with us to help us move in this direction.

- “*a firm faith, unshakeable as a rock, prompting you to remain firm and steadfast in the midst of storms and tempests...*” We only have to think of Mary “*standing at the foot of the Cross*”. What was left, then, of the promises of the Annunciation? For the disciples, the trial was too much, their faith dark in the midst of the storm. Mary alone, the faithful one *par excellence*, kept faith and continued to hope against all hope. God could not deny himself; she continued to believe that he would fulfil his promises, against all odds. How would he do this? Only he could know; it was important and enough to trust in him.

Inevitably, some day, we will come up against the cross, and this is a trial for our faith. If we live “*with Mary*” we will know that she is there, with all her own experience, to teach us how to hold on, “*firm in faith*”, and to help us to accept and to offer it up.

- “*an active and probing faith which like some mysterious pass-key admits you into the mysteries of Jesus Christ and of man's final destiny and into the very heart of God himself...*”. The discovery of Jesus Christ and of the love he reveals to us (his own, that of his father, and that of the Holy Spirit): that is what Montfort promises us. Also self-knowledge and knowledge of what we are called to... And even more than that, entry “*into the very heart of God himself*”. This is what becomes possible when we let Mary share her faith with us.

- “*a courageous faith which inspires you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and the salvation of souls...*”. The generosity of a faith which desires only to respond to the love of God while seeking to give glory to him, zeal, and the gift of ourselves for the salvation of our brothers and sisters: again this is what we can contemplate in Mary, and what we can expect also in our service.

- “*Lastly, this faith will be your flaming torch, your very life with God, your secret fund of divine Wisdom...*”. We are aware of just how much Montfort himself sought after this treasure of divine Wisdom, that is, Jesus himself, and how he carried out his search through Mary. May we be able to pray with the same faith he had: “*Worthy Mother of God, Virgin pure and faithful, / Share with me your faith. / By this I will gain Wisdom / And all good things will come to me. / Come, then, Wisdom, through Mary's faith. /*

*You could not resist her, / She gave life to you, / She helped you become Incarnate.*” (Hymn 124, verses 7-8).

- *“(a faith which will be) an all-powerful weapon for you to enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love. It restores life to those who are dead through sin. It moves and transforms hearts of marble and cedars of Lebanon by gentle and convincing argument. Finally, this faith will strengthen you to resist the devil and the other enemies of salvation”*. For a Christian, this programme for apostolic life should be the normal consequence of baptism. Mary is with us, to help us discover this and give us the strength to commit ourselves to it more and more.

## **b) Mary helps us to know ourselves**

Self-knowledge is essential for anyone who wants to take control of their lives. Essential, but not easy! If there is one area where illusion is all too easy, this is it. To recognise and accept ourselves in our own poverty, with our own limits, wretchedness and weakness, requires a great deal of humility, and this does not come naturally. Yet there can be no progress in the spiritual life without paying this price. Montfort knows this only too well, and this is why he returns often to this point. He does so as a saint, with no fear of the truth, and as a mystic who, living by an intense faith, is able to see the sinner in the light of God’s love.

Before we accuse him of exaggeration or pessimism when he asks us to stand before the reality of our *“evil nature”*<sup>6</sup>, it would be good to try to understand him better and to ask ourselves if it is not he who is right, even if at first glance the harshness of his language offends us: *“By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his faithful spouse, you will perceive your evil nature, your corruption and how incapable you are of any good apart from that which God produces in you as Author of nature and of grace. As a consequence of this knowledge you will despise yourself and think of yourself only as an object of repugnance... Finally, the humble Virgin Mary will share her humility with you so that, although you regard yourself with distaste and desire to be disregarded by others, you will not look down slightly upon anyone”* (TD 213). Here we need to notice several things.

### ***The reality of sin***

There is no point in being blind: the world in which we live is stained by sin, as we are ourselves. We are therefore called to a continual

“conversion”, to turn away from sin and whatever leads us to sin, that is, quite simply, to live out the promises of our baptism. Sin is within us when we commit sin. And, whether we like it or not, its roots are themselves also within us, through the sad inheritance which we call “*original sin*”. We are not personally responsible for this “*original sin*”, but we suffer its consequences, in a mysterious but real way.

All this is what Montfort calls our “*evil nature*”, our “*corruption*”. And it is Christ himself who tells us “*how incapable (we) are of any good apart from that which God produces in (us) as Author of nature and of grace*”: “*Without me, you can do nothing*”. Must we then become discouraged; must we despair? Certainly not, since Jesus came to lift us out of our wretchedness, and Mary is with us to help us to be open to salvation.

### ***How Christ comes to lift us out of sin***

Because he treats us as people who are free and responsible, Jesus will not save us without our co-operation: he demands that we collaborate with him. We begin to do so when we agree to allow ourselves to be saved, and so when we experience the need of salvation. If it is difficult enough to care for and heal someone who believes that they are not ill, it is impossible to do so when it is a question of spiritual sickness such as sin. So we have to reach the point where we recognise ourselves as “*sinners*”, and to do so we have to identify the sickness which is in us. The Church invites us to do this, especially during the whole of the Eucharistic celebration, so that we might be open to receive the salvation Christ brings to us. The Lord wills to have need of our humility so as to fill us with his favours, for it is this humility which opens us up to his mercy: “*He brings down the mighty from their thrones, and raises the lowly; he fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich away empty...*”.

### ***To despise oneself... so as to come to love oneself truly***

“*As a consequence of this knowledge you will despise yourself...*”. But it is a matter of “*despising oneself*”, “*hating oneself*” in a Gospel sense. This is the condition for genuine love of oneself, which God commands of us, as Jesus reminds us: “*You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole strength and your whole mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. The second is just as important: you must love your neighbour as yourself*” (Mt 22,37-39).

How are we to reconcile these two demands: to love ourselves and to despise ourselves at the same time? By detesting in ourselves the sin we find and whatever leads us to sin, so as to renounce it, and by loving in ourselves

whatever God loves, what he can never cease loving, because he is our Father, and because his love goes well beyond our wretchedness, our weaknesses and our failures.

Thus there is a “*despising ourselves*” which is wrong, when it leads to discouragement or despair, because then it is a refusal to believe in the love of God for us. And there is a “*despising ourselves*” which is good, for it makes us hate the evil we find in ourselves. It is certainly this that Montfort is drawing our attention to, since he attributes it to “*the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary*”. Besides, it is not a question of our always putting ourselves down: God has put good things in us, and, like Mary, we can give him thanks for them.

But we must not over-estimate our strength and what we are capable of, or we may suffer resounding failures, whether it is a question of our human life or our spiritual life. To deliberately refuse to take account of the supports and the help God gives us, beginning with Mary, is quite simply presumption and pride.

### ***Acceptance of oneself and of others***

This self-knowledge leads to true humility, which allows us to accept ourselves and to love ourselves in the light of God’s love for us. We learn to recognise what the Lord does in us and through us, and to give thanks to him for it; and we will come to share in his love and mercy towards our brothers and sisters. For humility also leads to acceptance of others, loved by God just as they are. Who are we, in fact, to judge or despise them? What might we have done in their shoes? Thus we will no longer try to push ourselves forward, thinking ourselves superior to others; we will no longer be tempted to see the splinter in the other’s eye, while ignoring the plank in our own.

### ***With Mary***

When we make the effort to live with confidence in the climate of Mary’s motherly love, we will certainly come much more easily to a point of self-knowledge, of humility, of self-acceptance and acceptance of others. In fact, we can rely on Mary, the faithful Spouse of the Holy Spirit, for that. Because she is the Immaculate one, the one on whom evil has never had any hold, she shares in a unique way in the mercy of the Lord for sinners like ourselves.

And, Montfort tells us, to agree to depend on Mary, the better to find Christ and move towards the Father, is a real school of detachment from oneself, “*an expression of great humility, a virtue which God loves above all*

*others... 'God opposes the proud, but gives his graces to the humble'. If you humble yourself, convinced that you are unworthy to appear before him, or even to approach him, he condescends to come down to you. He is pleased to be with you and exalts you in spite of yourself... How dearly he loves the humble of heart! It is to such humility that this devotion leads us, for it teaches us never to go alone directly to our Lord, however gentle and merciful though he may be, but always to use Mary's power of intercession, whether we want to enter his presence, speak to him, be near him, offer him something, seek union with him or consecrate ourselves to him" (TD 143).*

### **3. OTHER BENEFITS OF LIVING THE CONSECRATION**

#### **a) It obtains many blessings from our Lady**

To give a brief summary of the thought of St. Louis Marie on this: if , in abandoning ourselves completely into her hands, we leave Mary full liberty to give us a “finish” to her own satisfaction, then she will take great delight in making us “*presentable*” in her Son’s eyes. As an expert and an accomplished teacher of the spiritual life, she will ask only that she may give us a share in her riches: “*The Blessed Virgin, mother of gentleness and mercy, never allows herself to be surpassed in love and generosity. When she sees someone giving himself entirely to her in order to honour and serve her, and depriving himself of what he prizes most in order to adorn her, she gives herself completely in a wondrous manner to him. She engulfs him in the ocean of her graces, adorns him with her merits, supports him with her power, enlightens him with her light, and fills him with her love. She shares her virtues with him - her humility, faith, purity, etc. She makes up for his failings and becomes his representative with Jesus...*” (TD 144). We should read and meditate on the passages where Montfort explains in a very imaginative way the work Mary, our Mother, would like to accomplish in us, either here in numbers 145-150, or else “*in the story of Jacob and Rebecca*” in nos. 183-212.

#### **b) Communication of the spirit of Mary**

To think like Mary, to see Jesus and the Father as she does, to let oneself be formed by the Spirit of Jesus, like her: is this possible? Can we

hope to experience for ourselves and our brothers and sisters the sentiments of Mary? Have we any right to dream of viewing reality, the events of our lives and our world, our own joys and sorrows, and those of the ones we love, through her eyes? If Mary gives herself to us, in response to the gift we make of ourselves to her, then yes, because we will be sharing in what is the essence of her spiritual life.

While Montfort does not speak explicitly of all these consequences, they are truly implied by what he does say: *“The soul of Mary will be communicated to you to glorify the Lord. Her spirit will take the place of yours to rejoice in God, her Saviour, but only if you are faithful to the practices of this devotion... When will that happy day come... when God's Mother is enthroned in men's hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son? When will souls breathe Mary as the body breathes air?... That day will dawn only when the devotion I teach is understood and put into practice”* (TD 217).

If we share in Mary's sentiments, if we are animated by her spirit, then we will be irresistibly drawn towards Jesus, united with him and reformed and transformed in his likeness. A true *“transformation of souls in Mary into the likeness of Jesus Christ”* will take place little by little.

This is the goal of the consecration, and Montfort tells us that it cannot fail to be achieved if we are faithful to putting into effect his “practice”: *“If Mary, the Tree of Life, is well cultivated in our soul by fidelity to this devotion, she will in due time bring forth her fruit which is none other than Jesus”*.

And St. Louis Marie returns to the ease and the effectiveness of his method: *“I have seen many devout souls searching for Jesus in one way or another, and so often when they have worked hard throughout the night, all they can say is, ‘Despite our having worked all night, we have caught nothing.’ To them we can say, ‘You have worked hard and gained little; Jesus can only be recognised faintly in you.’ But if we follow the immaculate path of Mary, living the devotion that I teach, we will always work in daylight, we will work in a holy place, and we will work but little. There is no darkness in Mary, not even the slightest shadow since there was never any sin in her. She is a holy place, a holy of holies, in which saints are formed and moulded”* (TD 218).

After this Montfort develops the metaphor of the mould, of which we have already spoken, and which, if it is valid for all *“true devotion”* to Mary, is especially applicable and useful when his perfect practice is under consideration.



### c) Great confidence in God and in Mary

*“Our Blessed Lady will fill you with unbounded confidence in God and in herself...” (TD 216). Our confidence in Mary can only grow as we experience the benefits of her motherly presence; and this cannot be lacking if we try to live “through her” and “with her”. The more we manage effectively to give ourselves to her, the more she can give herself to us: “Since you have now given yourself completely to Mary, body and soul, she, who is generous to the generous, and more generous than even the kindest benefactor, will in return give herself to you in a marvellous but real manner... What will still further increase your confidence in her is that, after having given her in trust all that you possess to use or keep as she pleases, you will place less trust in yourself and much more in her whom you have made your treasury. How comforting and how consoling when a person can say, ‘The treasury of God, where he has placed all that he holds most precious, is also my treasury.’” (TD 216).*

As our confidence in God grows at the same pace as our confidence in Mary, we will come to possess, little by little, *“great liberty of spirit”* (TD 169-170). Who does not want to be free? But we must not be mistaken about liberty! It is not when we follow our own selfish desires or whims that we are free with the liberty of the children of God; it is only when we become capable of doing what the Lord asks of us. Mary always wills what God wills. To the extent that we live out our consecration, that is, depend on Jesus through her, and let ourselves be guided by her in the choices we make, then we are approaching true liberty.

Montfort tells us we can rely on the generosity of both Jesus and Mary to give us those interior dispositions which will allow us to live at ease in filial confidence: *“Through this devotion we make ourselves slaves of Jesus by consecrating ourselves entirely to him. To reward us for this enslavement of love, our Lord frees us from every scruple and servile fear which might restrict, imprison or confuse us; he opens our hearts and fills them with holy confidence in God, helping us to regard God as our Father; he inspires us with a generous and filial love”* (TD 169).

We can also rely on Mary. One of the effects of living the consecration is, according to Montfort, the grace of pure love: *“The Mother of fair love will rid your heart of all scruples and inordinate servile fear. She will open and enlarge it to obey the commandments of her Son with alacrity and with the holy freedom of the children of God. She will fill your heart with pure love of which she is the treasury. You will then cease to act as you did before, out of fear of the God who is love, but rather out of pure love. You will look upon him as a loving Father and endeavour to please him at all*

*times. You will speak trustfully to him as a child does to its father. If you should have the misfortune to offend him you will abase yourself before him and humbly beg his pardon. You will offer your hand to him with simplicity and lovingly rise from your sin. Then, peaceful and relaxed and buoyed up with hope you will continue on your way to him” (TD 215).*

This is the filial attitude, fully conscious and trusting, to which God invites us. Let us look on Mary, let us entrust ourselves to her, and she will lead us, as it were, by the hand to the one who is “*Our Father*”.

#### **d) Service of God (TD 135-138), the glory of God (TD 151; 222-225), and the good of our neighbour (TD 171-172)**

We have already mentioned these motives when showing how they call us to apostolic action (cf. pg. 76). Here we would like to look at certain complementary traits.

##### ***The service of God***

To serve God! If we wish to truly live as Christians, we cannot be content with saying with our lips: “*Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done*”. We have to take action to bring this about. Yet, often, a chasing after our own personal interests, which do not always fit in with what God wants, can prevent us from giving ourselves over completely to his service. Montfort assures us that our consecration, taken seriously, must obtain for us the grace to come to this point more and more: “*Moreover, as I have said before, no other act of devotion enables us to rid ourselves so easily of the possessiveness which slips unnoticed even into our best actions. This is a remarkable grace which our dear Lord grants us in return for the heroic and selfless surrender to him through Mary of the entire value of our good works... Jesus, our dearest friend, gave himself to us without reserve, body and soul, grace and merits...He was generous with us first, so let us be generous to him in return and he will prove still more generous during life, at the hour of death, and throughout eternity*” (TD 137-138).

##### ***The glory of God, the glory of Christ***

In making us available for the service of God, the consecration makes us capable of giving him the glory which he expects from us. If we have fully understood that we come from God and must go back to him through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, and if we have also understood that all he wants is our happiness, than giving glory to him should be a major preoccupation of our spiritual lives. For God wishes to find his glory in our own success. It is easy

to see that total consecration of ourselves to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, properly lived out, is an excellent means of achieving this double end.

*“If you live this devotion sincerely, you will give more glory to Jesus in a month than in many years of a more demanding devotion. Here are my reasons for saying this:*

*“1) Since you do everything through the Blessed Virgin as required by this devotion, you naturally lay aside your own intentions no matter how good they appear to you. You abandon yourself to our Lady's intentions even though you do not know what they are. Thus you share in the high quality of her intentions, which are so pure that she gave more glory to God by the smallest of her actions, say, twirling her distaff... than did St. Laurence suffering his cruel martyrdom on the grid-iron, and even more than all the saints together in all their most heroic deeds!” (TD 222).*

Sharing in *“the high quality of her intentions”* is what happens, almost naturally, for one who, giving up his or her own personal intentions, says to Mary: *“It is for you to direct all that just as you want, because you know much better than I how to bring about the glory of God, the good of my brothers and sisters, and whatever is best for myself.”*

If we think of Mary, her only concern is to turn us towards God: *“4) Lastly, you never think of Mary without Mary thinking of God for you. You never praise or honour Mary without Mary joining you in praising and honouring God. Mary is entirely relative to God. Indeed I would say that she was relative only to God, because she exists uniquely in reference to him. She is an echo of God, speaking and repeating only God. If you say ‘Mary’ she says ‘God’. When St. Elizabeth praised Mary calling her blessed because she had believed, Mary, the faithful echo of God, responded with her canticle, ‘My soul glorifies the Lord.’ What Mary did on that day, she does every day. When we praise her, when we love and honour her, when we present anything to her, then God is praised, honoured and loved and receives our gift through Mary and in Mary” (TD 225).*

### ***The good of our neighbour***

The glory of God lies in the success of man, of every human being. And this brings us back to the service of our brothers and sisters. Service of our neighbour belongs by right to all spirituality, for it is an absolutely essential element of the Christian life in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of putting into effect the great commandment of Jesus: *“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another” (Jn 13,34).* Mary was the first to put this into practice, and she continues to do so in the

fulfilment of her maternal mission towards us. We say to her by our consecration: *“All that I have is yours; do with it what you will.”* And by this we are certain that what we offer her will best serve the true interests of our brothers and sisters: *“Is this not perfect love of our neighbour? Is this not being a true disciple of our Lord, one who should always be recognised by his love? Is this not the way to convert sinners without any danger of vainglory, and deliver souls from Purgatory by doing hardly anything more than what we are obliged to do by our state of life?”* (TD 171).

But there is more: *“It must be noted that our good works, passing through Mary’s hands, are progressively purified. Consequently, their merit and their satisfactory and prayer value are also increased”* (TD 172). And so they are still more useful to our neighbour.

### **e) This devotion is a wonderful means of perseverance**

This is true, as we have seen, of all *“true devotion”* to Mary (cf. pg. 42). It is all the more true for *“the perfect practice”* of true devotion: *“By this devotion we entrust all we possess to Mary, the faithful Virgin. We choose her as the guardian of all our possessions in the natural and supernatural sphere. We trust her because she is faithful, we rely on her strength, we count on her mercy and charity to preserve and increase our virtues and merits in spite of the efforts of the devil, the world, and the flesh to rob us of them. We say to her as a good child would say to its mother or a faithful servant to the mistress of the house, ‘...Please accept in trust everything I possess, and in your faithfulness and power keep it for me. If you watch over me, I shall lose nothing. If you support me, I shall not fail. If you protect me, I shall be safe from my enemies’”* (TD 173).

This explains the conclusion drawn by St. Louis Marie: *“Blessed is the man who has given everything to Mary, who at all times and in all things trusts in her, and loses himself in her. He belongs to Mary and Mary belongs to him. With David he can boldly say, ‘She was created for me’, or with the beloved disciple, ‘I have taken her for my own’, or with our Lord himself, ‘All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine’”* (TD 179).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **LEARNING FROM MARY TO BECOME A TRUE DISCIPLE**

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel. The first lesson we learn here is to look, to listen, to meditate and penetrate the meaning - at once so deep and so mysterious - of this very simple, very humble and very beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Perhaps we learn, even imperceptibly, the lesson of imitation. Here we learn the method which will permit us to understand who Christ is...

Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ. How gladly would I become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and the highest wisdom of divine truths.

Paul VI - Discourse in Nazareth, 5 January 1964

# **Part III**

## **The Implementation of Perfect Consecration**

### **Chapter One**

#### *Preparation for Consecration*

#### **1. DIRECTIVES AND COUNSELS GIVEN BY MONTFORT**

##### **a) Necessity for a preparation**

Total consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary is for Montfort a very important action. It is not a matter of saying a beautiful prayer in a moment of fervour, but a real gift of oneself and a commitment which must last a lifetime. Hence the necessity of taking the time to reflect and put oneself in the best possible dispositions, so as to give this action its full value. St. Louis Marie proposes a method of preparation which lasts thirty-three days, and comprises a process in which we find the main themes of all spiritual life, with a special presence of Mary. It is certainly possible, and it might be a good thing, to adopt other ways of going about preparing oneself for the consecration, but we should take care to keep to the spirit which is behind the method presented to us by our guide<sup>1</sup>.

## **b) The method to follow**

*“Those who desire to take up this special devotion... should spend at least twelve days in emptying themselves of the spirit of the world, which is opposed to the spirit of Jesus, ... They should then spend three weeks imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus through the most Blessed Virgin”* (TD 227). Here we are presented with the essential rhythm of all Christian life, as given us in the Gospel: an emptying of ourselves through renunciation of all, within ourselves and around us, that is opposed to Jesus Christ, so that he might take possession of us through his Spirit. In fact it is the Spirit of Jesus that permits us to rid ourselves of the spirit of the world. The effort Montfort asks of us to be emptied of ourselves is indispensable, but, in order to bear fruit, it must take place under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

### ***“Emptying themselves of the spirit of the world”***

Today we no longer possess the explanations put forward by Montfort which were to be found *“in the first part of this preparation for the reign of Jesus Christ”*<sup>2</sup>. But we have enough information from the other writings of St. Louis Marie to fill this gap. In fact, it is a question of a decisive choice to be made between Jesus and the world of sin which is dominated by evil and the spirit of evil, for *“No-one can serve two masters...”* (Mt 6,24). This radical choice is at the heart of the promises of Baptism. These involve the renouncing of evil and sin, and an adhering to God by the profession of faith. With the logic of the saints, Montfort asks us in the consecration to take the renewal of our Baptismal promises to their furthest limit.

In fact, we must renounce not only sin, but also anything which can lead us into sin, beginning with what St. Louis Marie calls *“the spirit of the world”* or *“the wisdom of the world”*: *“This worldly wisdom consists in an exact conformity to the maxims and fashions of the world; a continual inclination towards greatness and esteem; and a subtle and endless pursuit of pleasure and self-interest, not in an uncouth and blatant way by scandalous sin, but in an astute, discreet, and deceitful way. Otherwise the world would no longer label it wisdom but pure licentiousness”* (LEW 75).

So Montfort is thinking of all those more or less subtle *“compromises”* with ways of acting which, while purporting to respect the essential demands of the Gospel, nevertheless take many liberties with its true spirit in order to fit in with the world’s fashions or the demands of egoism. We must try to see how we ourselves go along with these compromises. And so we have a serious examination of conscience to make.

## ***“Imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus”***

They will “*spend three weeks imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus through the most Blessed Virgin*”.

The first week is devoted to asking for “*knowledge of themselves*”, the second week to “*an understanding of the Blessed Virgin*”, and during the third week “*they should seek to understand Jesus Christ better*”.

### **First week: knowledge of themselves**

*“During the first week they should offer up all their prayers and acts of devotion to acquire knowledge of themselves and sorrow for their sins. Let them perform all their actions in a spirit of humility. With this end in view they may, if they wish, meditate on what I have said concerning our corrupted nature... They will ask our Lord and the Holy Spirit to enlighten them saying, ‘Lord, that I may see,’ or ‘Lord, let me know myself,’ or the ‘Come, Holy Spirit’. Every day they should say the Litany of the Holy Spirit, with the prayer that follows... They will turn to our Blessed Lady and beg her to obtain for them that great grace which is the foundation of all others, the grace of self-knowledge. For this intention they will say each day the Ave Maris Stella and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin” (TD 228).*

A good knowledge of oneself is the beginning of wisdom. If we truly want to take control of our lives, we have to know what we are and where we have got to, what our strengths and weaknesses are, what we can rely on in ourselves to back up our efforts, and what difficulties we are likely to encounter.

One of the great obstacles to progress in union with Christ and with Mary, is our attachment to ourselves, the selfishness we find it so hard to be rid of. We have to accept that we cannot cure ourselves of this by our own efforts alone: it is beyond our means. Christ has told us: “*Without me, you can do nothing.*” But with him, we can do all things, for “*nothing is impossible to God.*”

We know all that... Yet it is one thing to know it in a general and theoretical way, without its having much effect on our behaviour, and quite another to be deeply convinced of it, in such a way that we really draw out the consequences for our lives. To begin with, it is a question of coming to a real attitude of humility: if we recognise that we are weak sinners, we will attach much less importance to ourselves, and will be less tempted to judge others, thinking of ourselves as better than they are. We will have a better understanding of the fact that everything that we possess we have received in the first place, and so we cannot glory in it. If we accept also that all that we have been able to do, we owe to Christ and his Spirit, we will be less tempted



to take to ourselves all the glory. It is not a matter of denying all our own value, the qualities that we possess or our capacity to do well: that would be to despise what God has given us. But it is a question of recognising where these things come from. And as for the weaknesses we find in ourselves, and the faults we have allowed them to lead us to, we must recognise these faithfully, and ask pardon for them in simplicity and with filial devotion.

For two people to be able to come together “in truth”, both have to be truthful before each other. We see this everyday in our relations with others. And it is no different in our encounter with the Lord. If we try to hide ourselves from him, as Adam and Eve did in Paradise after the Fall, because we no longer have the courage to see ourselves as we really are, how can we hope to meet him in truth? This self-knowledge, in the light of God’s love, is a necessary condition of our progress in the spiritual life.

It is not easy to reach this true clarity with regard to ourselves, and the humility which must be its result. We have to push ourselves towards it; but we must also realise that it is the result of a “*great grace*” which we must beg for in our prayer.

### **Second week: an understanding of the Blessed Virgin**

*“Each day of the second week they should endeavour in all their prayers and works to acquire an understanding of the Blessed Virgin and ask the Holy Spirit for this grace. They may read and meditate upon what we have already said about her. They should recite daily the Litany of the Holy Spirit and the Ave Maris Stella as during the first week. In addition they will say at least five decades of the Rosary for greater understanding of Mary”* (TD 229).

Montfort earlier gave us a forceful reminder that a sufficient knowledge of Mary and of her mission in our regard was necessary for a true devotion towards her. To see Mary as God made her and to receive her in our lives as he has given her to us, should help us to arrive at a correct attitude towards her, and safeguard us from all the “*false devotions*”. So, when we come to the point of taking “*true devotion*” to Mary to its limit, that is to a total gift of oneself to her so as to belong wholly to Jesus through her, it is very important to refresh and to deepen the vision that we have of her. In particular, we need to see clearly the necessary bond there is between Mary and Jesus (TD 63) and how Mary leads us to Jesus, enables us to love him, and makes us faithful to him.

Montfort also told us that this is not a matter of looking for a dry and speculative knowledge, without any great effect on our lives, but rather a knowledge which plays an important role in the experience of life with Mary.

This knowledge will come much more from prayer and meditation than from books. Nevertheless we must not exclude these, but we do need to choose books adapted to our own capacity. Montfort himself invites us to “*read and meditate*” what he has said about Mary. Today, he would certainly refer us back to the Gospels, which are now accessible to everyone, and which remain our primary source; he would invite those who can, to read the major documents of the Magisterium on Mary. And in our day many books might be recommended<sup>3</sup>.

Let us hold onto what Montfort advises: above all, ask the Holy Spirit, who alone can reveal Mary to us, to help us know her (cf. TD 263); and hold on to the Rosary, where we will discover the intimate relationship of Jesus with Mary in his mysteries. For someone who is making the preparation for consecration in the midst of their ordinary everyday lives (which will be the case for many), it will probably be difficult include a meditation on all fifteen decades of the Rosary each day, maybe even just five decades. But it should always be possible, even for those immersed in full professional activity, to guarantee a few mysteries each day.

### **Third week**

*“During the third week they should seek to understand Jesus Christ better. They may read and meditate on what we have already said about him. They may say the prayer of St. Augustine which they will find at the beginning of the second part of this book. Again with St. Augustine, they may pray repeatedly, ‘Lord, that I may know you,’ or ‘Lord, that I may see.’ As during the previous week, they should recite the Litany of the Holy Spirit and the Ave Maris Stella, adding every day the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus”* (TD 230).

The essential book here is, and remains, the Gospel. A meditative reading of the Gospel must lead to a living encounter with Jesus Christ. Montfort does not mention here the Rosary (of fifteen decades, or even of five decades), but there is no doubt that for him, it is a very special way of contemplating and getting to know Jesus.

The prayers St. Louis Marie recommends for this time of preparation are chosen with care. Apart from the Rosary, which is particularly recommended for the second week, they are of two types: litanies, and what could be called ejaculatory prayers, that is, short but expressive formulae repeated often.

## ***Prayers to the Holy Spirit, Mary and Jesus***

The Litany of the Holy Spirit is mentioned for each phase. Montfort is well aware, in fact, that knowledge of ourselves, of Mary and of Jesus Christ, does not depend just on our efforts; it is also, and primarily, a gift of the Holy Spirit, for it is rooted in faith. It is the Spirit of Jesus who is the real master in our spiritual life, and who can accord us entry into an understanding of the mysteries of God; it is he who must remain our guide throughout our progress in the perfect practice of true devotion. So it is quite natural that we should keep a place for him throughout this preparatory period, and that our prayer should be an insistent plea to obtain from him what we are seeking. The Litany of the Holy Spirit can help us in this, as it leads us to a deeper knowledge of the Spirit of Jesus.

It is also quite natural that prayer to Mary should be present in every phase of a preparation which is like a sort of novitiate for entry into a life consecrated to Jesus through Mary. So the Litany of the Blessed Virgin is suggested right from the first week, and the Rosary of fifteen or five decades for the second week, while the *Ave Maris Stella* is mentioned for each of the three weeks.

The place given to prayer addressed to Jesus may appear, at a superficial glance, to be rather restricted. But it only *seems* like that. Even if the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus only appears in the third week, the first “*ejaculatory prayers*” indicated for the first week are addressed to him, as are those that we find in the third week. And Montfort is well aware that, even if the Rosary is a “*Marian prayer*”, it leads us to a contemplation of Jesus in his mysteries.

### ***The type of prayer***

Why do we have, above all, litany-style prayers and short formulae to be repeated often? This is no doubt because they are particularly suited to the goal in view. Litanies are made up of a series of invocations addressed directly to those to whom we are praying. The titles or qualities mentioned call to mind, one after another, the various aspects of their personalities.

Being for the most part borrowed from Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, the terms used lend themselves very well to a contemplation, at once admiring and loving, in which we can experience in faith the active presence of the Spirit, of Jesus and of Mary in our lives. Litany-style prayers can become a real dialogue, and the requests often included at the end of the invocations can be made with great confidence, founded as they are on the goodness, power and attentiveness shown to us by those to whom we pray.

The repetitive character of litany-style prayers, properly understood, is quite the opposite of a way of praying condemned by Jesus in the Gospel (Mt 6,7-8): “*babbling*”. The latter, in fact, arises from an almost magical idea of prayer, as though we could teach God something he did not know, or oblige him to intervene by the mechanical repetition of a formula. In a litany, on the contrary, we should be seeking to look, admire, and arrive at a better knowledge, so as to be able to love more deeply.

Ejaculatory prayers should be used in the same spirit. Through their repetition, they should immerse us in the presence of those to whom they are addressed, and deepen in us our conviction of the importance of what we pray for, and so our desire to obtain it. It is possible to emulate in this way of praying, the spirit behind the “Jesus prayer” so beloved of our Eastern brothers and sisters.

### ***In a climate of complete confidence***

Finally, this preparation should be made in a climate of complete confidence, even while it is concentrating on discovering our own poverty, weakness and powerlessness. This confidence will be all the greater the more we are able to ground it in the infinite love borne towards us by the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and in the incomparable maternal love of Mary for each one of us. Let us not forget what Montfort wanted to say when he told us that “*true devotion*” is “*tender*” (TD 107).

It is certainly possible to suggest other preparation schemes, with different “prayers”. But we should take great care to retain the objectives set forth by St. Louis Marie.

## **2. TWO SUGGESTED PREPARATION SCHEMES**

Basing ourselves on the directives offered by St. Louis Marie, we suggest here a few possible schemes to help in preparation: topics for reflection, scriptural references and prayers.

The first scheme, of a more Biblical nature, follows exactly the unfolding suggested by Montfort: 12 days and three weeks. The second suggestion, of a more existential nature, stretches over a period of four weeks corresponding to the four objectives set forth by our spiritual guide, but following a slightly different progression. Each week includes six points for reflection and meditation, one point for each day, with a sort of “revision” day.

The suggestions for readings and prayers might be added to or modified. The main thing is to pray, and to pray on the topic of meditation.

## **A. Preparation over 12 days and 3 weeks (*Fr. Pio Suarez, S.M.M.*)**

### ***1. The “twelve days”***

To help us to see that we are intended for God, what mission he has entrusted to us, and where he is asking us to go in the course of history, here are some texts.

The encounter between God and human beings. God loved us first, since he created us; he wants our friendship and he came to meet us in Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, through the wonder of the Incarnation. He tells us, through all this, that we have value in his eyes; he reveals to us our own dignity.

**Recommended readings:** Jn 1,1-18; GS (= *Gaudium et Spes*) 22; LEW 64-72.

Creation and salvation. We were created by God; it was he who willed that we should be made in his own image and likeness, with a very special predilection for us; it is he who intervenes in history to save his people.

**Recommended readings:** Gen 1,1-2; 4a; Ps 136; LG (= *Lumen Gentium*) 2; LEW 31-38.

Human beings, priests of Creation. The creation was placed at the disposition of human beings by God, that it might serve for their good. But humans must also lend creation their voice to make it sing the glory of the Creator. In the New Covenant, the baptised share in the priesthood of Christ “they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light” (LG 10).

**Recommended readings:** Dan 3,57-90; LG 10-11; TD 55-59.

Human beings and history. We are in the service of the Lord, so our lives and our actions should be oriented towards him, for we belong to Christ. So it is up to Christians to work that history might be shot through more and more with the spirit of the Gospel, so that it might lead to the Kingdom of God.

**Recommended readings:** Col 3,23-25; GS 86 and 93; TD 68.

## *2. The three weeks*

### **A. The first week: self-knowledge**

The value and dignity of humans. “What is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and splendour” (Ps 8). The human person who can say to God, “Abba, Father”, because re-created by the Spirit, in the womb of Mary, in the image of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

**Recommended readings:** Ps 8 and Rom 8,14-17; GS 12; TD 219-221.

Our condition as sinners. To know oneself is also to accept oneself as being a sinner. The sin which goes back to the origins of humanity, and whose consequences we have to bear; the sin that, in our weakness, we commit sometimes... But God always waits for us, and we have to read again the story of the Prodigal Son. We have to “empty ourselves of what is bad in us”, and Mary is with us to help us in this.

**Recommended readings:** Gen 3,1-24; Lk 15,11-32; GS 13; LEW 39-40; TD 78-82.

Risen with Christ. Baptism, in plunging us into the redemptive death of Jesus, brought us to the birth of the new life and we are promised the Resurrection. It is for us to work that the creation might itself also be transfigured by the power for renewal Christ brings us. As we carry this treasure in fragile vessels, let us entrust everything to Mary.

**Recommended readings:** Rom 6,3-6; GS 39; TD 173-182.

### **B. The second week: knowledge of Mary**

Mary in the work of salvation. She is the woman through whom we have been given the one who is our salvation, our very Life who renews everything; she is the woman whom the Trinity chose to bring about the wonder of the Incarnation; she is the Handmaid of the Lord who said “YES” to being the Mother of God and our mother.

**Recommended readings:** Gal 4,4-7; Lk 1,26-38; LG 55-59; TD 14-39.

Mary, Mother of the Church. By her collaboration in the whole of the work of salvation, right up to the Cross, Mary contributed to the birth of the members of Christ, the Church. She watches over us in a motherly way.

**Recommended readings:** Jn 19,25-27; LG 60-61; TD 201 ff.

Mary and the Holy Spirit. Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Mary is associated with his action in bringing salvation to the ends of the earth, and most especially in forming the apostles which the Church needs.

**Recommended readings:** Acts 1,8 and 14; Prayer for Missionaries 15-18; TD 34-36 and 43-46.

### **C. The third week: knowledge of Christ**

Christ and the history of our salvation. Christ was sent by the Father “to bring the times to their accomplishment, to bring everything together under Christ as head” (Eph 1,10); having come into our world by the Incarnation, he pursued his earthly journey up to the Passion, to pass from this world to the Father, so as to take us with him.

**Recommended readings:** Eph 1,3-14; Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [=SC]) 5; LEW 105-108 and 115-116.

The Cross of Christ, the secret of our salvation. The “descent” of eternal Wisdom to us, and to the cross which opens for him the way of glorification. It is for us to follow him, especially thanks to the Eucharist, which allows us to be associated with the triumph of the Cross in and through the Paschal mystery.

**Recommended readings:** Phil 2,5-11; SC 6; GS 22; LEW 172-173.

The risen Christ, the culminating point of our life. “For us, our homeland is in heaven, and from heaven comes the saviour we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body” (Phil 3,20-21). This what the Church is waiting for, the Church which he animates by his Spirit and which “he fills... with his divine gifts so that it may increase and attain to all the fullness of God” (LG 7). True devotion to Mary enables us to recognise Christ as “our ultimate end”.

**Recommended readings:** Phil 3,7-14; Jn 6,60-69; Col 1,12-20; LG 3, 7; TD 61-62.

### **B. A Preparation over 4 weeks (*Anonymous Montfortian author*<sup>4</sup>)**

This suggestion for a preparation is spread over a period of four weeks, corresponding to the four objectives set forth by St. Louis Marie, but with a development which is somewhat different.

Each week comprises six points for reflection and meditation, one point for each day. The seventh day can be used for a revision of the whole.

## *a. The world in which we find ourselves*

### **1. A fuller and better life... and without end!**

- We did not ask to live. But we do live on this earth.
- So now it is only right to ask of life what it can offer us that is best.
- And our own aspirations lead us in the direction of what is more and better.
- Is it possible to fulfil a dream that is beyond me? Who will help me in this?

### **2. In a world of human beings**

- Life has placed us in a world on which we depend.
- And in a history which carries us along in its flow.
- And in a human race which is incalculable in number and astonishing.
- But what can others do to bring about the full success of our life?

### **3. The world of human beings is also, and above all, the world of God.**

- The world is first and foremost God's world: the God of mankind.
- It is God who guides history from start to finish, with and for human beings.
- His plan of love for them: to lead them to happiness, to fill them.
- To succeed in my life depends on my welcoming freely this plan (life wisdom).

### **4. Life wisdom - according to God's way**

- All human creatures, being free and responsible for success in their lives, owe it to themselves to reflect and to choose a life-wisdom.
- Above and beyond all human forms of wisdom - sometimes very beautiful in themselves - there is God's wisdom revealed to us in the Bible: the wisdom of salvation and fullness, manifested above all in Jesus Christ, "Eternal Wisdom".

### **5. The danger of false forms of wisdom evident in the world**

- Apart from genuine forms of human wisdom and the wisdom of God, there have appeared, since the very beginning, false forms of



wisdom which are deceptive regarding success in life, and are inspired by the “Father of lies”, the enemy of God and human beings.

- Their aim is to turn humans away from God and to turn them in on themselves (selfishness, vanity, pride) and towards earthly things (money, material possessions...).
- These false forms of wisdom (“the spirit of the world”) affect us to a greater or lesser extent.

## **6. We must free ourselves of false forms of wisdom, “empty ourselves of the spirit of the world”**

- Because they deceive and are false, leading us astray or holding up our progress towards a fuller and better life with Jesus. Because we want to undertake a way of greater fidelity, in truth...
- What are these false forms of wisdom (these forms of selfishness, vanity, pride and excessive attachment to earthly goods)?

**Recommended readings:** Deut 30,15-20; Ps 1; 8; 32; 118; Is 40,9-30; Mt 6; 7; 1 Jn 2,15-22; 4,1-6; LEW chapter 7; TD 78-82.

**Suggested prayers:** to the Holy Spirit (*Veni Sancte Spiritus*); to Mary (*Rosary*).

### ***b. At the heart of the world and of history: Jesus Christ***

#### **1. Jesus: the well-beloved Son, sent into the world of human beings**

- He comes from very far away: from the depths of God’s heart.
- He is sent to bring to fulfilment the plan of God for human beings.
- Having become man in Mary, he conceives a passionate love for his Father.
- He takes the stance towards him of a fully loving and obedient Son.

#### **2. Jesus, the elder brother and Saviour of the human race**

- The deepest desire of his heart: to reveal his father to men and women.
- He consecrates himself, body and soul, to this mission, so as to save them all.
- He bears witness by the whole of his life to the tenderness of God.

- On the Cross he gives the supreme witness to this. His life-wisdom? To love!

### **3. Jesus: always at work in the world and in history**

- Risen and living, Jesus continues to be present among human beings and with them.
- The work that he carries out: the most marvellous undertaking ever known...
- And the most important and most decisive for success in human lives...
- The only one which will last into the new world: the old will disappear.

### **4. The work of Jesus in the world: to be realised through the Church**

- Through his Spirit, Jesus is at work in all men and women of good will.
- But he acts more specially in the visible sign which is the Church.
- The Church is first and foremost HIMSELF, and then all those who welcome him into their lives.
- Everything else in the Church (ministries, sacraments, etc.) is a sign of his presence and of his action.

### **5. The work of Jesus in us and through us**

- Through his Church, Jesus enters into the depths of our hearts.
- By the means he has left us, he heals us and gives us his Life.
- By the gift of his Spirit, he draws us into his own love for the Father and for all men and women.
- Jesus: our best Friend who is most brotherly, and most powerful.

### **6. Taking our stand beside Jesus in the world and in history**

- The supreme wisdom for life: to be as close as possible to Jesus...
- And to take our stand beside him in the context of our lives, throughout all our days.
- The most important thing for us to achieve each day: HIS WORK.

- Everything in us should become a means of service to his work in us and in our brothers and sisters.

**Recommended readings:** Lk 1,26-38; Jn 3,11-21; 10,22-39; 17; Mt 25,31-46; Rom 8; Eph 1; 2; 4; Phil 2,5-11; LEW 42-47; 64-71; TD 61-73.

**Suggested prayers:** each day, the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, and the *Ave Maris Stella*.

### *c. “I” in the world and in history*

To take **my** stand with **Jesus** in the world and in history, I have to know **myself** well: what **I** am, what **I** am called to become, **my** potential, **my** leanings.

#### **1. What I am as a human being, through my body and my soul**

- By my whole being, **I** am a gift from God to myself, entrusted to **me**.
- My origins lie in eternity, in creation and in my conception.
- My life is lived out according to the rhythm of my years, and my various activities.

#### **2. Called to live... to the point of sharing in the divine Life of Jesus**

- “I don’t want to die!”: the desire for a deeper and better life.
- Called to live at the level of my body, my mind, and my heart...
- Called to live with another life: the **life of Jesus** received in Baptism.

#### **3. Called to an ever deeper and better love: with Jesus**

- To live, at its best, is to love. This is the highest human achievement.
- We are worth what our heart is worth, depending on the quality of our loving.
- Jesus, through his Spirit, enables us to love as **he** does: “You must love...”

#### **4. Called to fight against the tendencies in myself to “love badly”**

- To love... and to love like Jesus is not always easy.

- There is a tendency in myself to love myself in a wrong sort of way, to the detriment of God and of others (selfishness, pride, ...)
- “The sinner, the one who loves evil” (Bernadette). Sin is first of all in the heart. To love is to fight to open oneself up, to give oneself.

## **5. Called to love in freedom, as a responsible person**

- Freedom: a marvellous prerogative of the human person, but one which makes him or her responsible for his or her own behaviour and way of loving.
- Freedom: the power to choose, with full consciousness, and with a preferential love, whom I will love and how.
- Freedom, in the final analysis, is the power to take one’s stand in the world and in history with Jesus, in relationship to God and to his loving will.

## **6. For ME, the greatest love, the greatest freedom...**

- Is to give myself completely to Jesus, to let myself be led in docility to his Spirit to love ever more deeply the Father and my brothers and sisters.
- My baptism has already set me on this road of love... on the way to **eternal life**.
- I am called to ratify this starting point everyday, and carry it to its conclusion.
- “It is in freedom that you learn how to become a slave”: through the love of the Lord... like Mary of Nazareth.

**Recommended readings:** Mt 5; Mk 12,28-34; Jn 8,31-36; 1 Cor 13; TD 68-75; 126-130.

**Suggested prayers:** to the Holy Spirit (*Litany*); to Mary (*Ave Maris Stella*).

### ***d. With Mary, towards the fullness of Jesus Christ***

Who is Mary in the world and in history? Who is she for me? What place ought I to give her in my life?

#### **1. Within the development of mankind: at a particular moment a woman blessed among all**

- Mary lived two thousand years ago. All generations have venerated her.

- The most human woman of all... and the one most filled with grace.
  - She is only the “Servant of the Lord”, but she brings into being the fullness of the messianic times.
- 2. A woman who became truly the Mother of Jesus, the only Son of God**
- The service asked of her by God: to conceive and give birth to the Saviour.
  - In freedom she reflected, then said “yes” to God, so much did she desire the salvation of men and women, indeed of all peoples.
  - Henceforth, for her, to serve will mean to be the Mother of Jesus, fully!
- 3. A woman who became, at the same time, the true spiritual Mother of the brothers and sisters, and disciples of Jesus**
- All real motherhood is first and foremost of a spiritual nature, by its origin and its end (to form a man or woman to fullness).
  - The spiritual maternity of Mary is the highest. Announced on Calvary, it was a reality from the moment of the Incarnation: the Mother of both Head and members.
  - Mary becomes effectively our spiritual Mother at our baptism.
- 4. A Mother to be found in our lives as brothers and sisters, disciples of Jesus**
- We do not need to look for Mary in our lives: she is present to us in a maternal way, concerned with helping us to live through and for Jesus: “Do whatever he tells you.”
  - She educates us in the wisdom of love in Jesus’ way, and the wisdom of all the virtues.
  - She intercedes for us, as “the one who found grace” for us.
- 5. A Mother with whom we owe it to ourselves to live in a filial relationship**
- The most important thing in our lives is to allow Jesus to achieve his work in us and through us, using the means he has given us in his Church...
  - And with the motherly help of Mary: we need to recognise her maternal role and conform ourselves to it: “Behold your Mother!”

- Some “practices” for finding Mary in our lives and relying on her example in the Gospel, and on her intercession...

**6. A Mother whose task with regard to Jesus and ourselves we ought to make as real as possible by consecrating ourselves totally to her for him**

- This is a practice based on the example of Jesus, and then on that of the disciple John.
- According to Montfort, it consists in a full gift of ourselves and all our goods.
- It commits us to nothing else than to live out our baptism, but more faithfully and more easily: with the help of Mary.
- Only one thing is demanded: the will to be converted to a full Christian life, and to advance along the path of Jesus.

**Recommended readings:** Lk 1,26-30; 2,39-52; Jn 19,25-27; TD 22-55; 116-121.

**Suggested prayers:** to the Holy Spirit (*Veni Sancte Spiritus*); to Mary (*Litany, Rosary*).

**C. Other Suggestions for Preparation**

Other forms of preparation are naturally possible. An example may be found in the “GOLDEN BOOK”, pgs. 343-350. Another, with a daily commentary, is in “LES EXERCICES PRÉPARATOIRES À LA CONSÉCRATION” (Fr. Dayet). In both these books will be found also the texts of the prayers recommended by Montfort (see the Bibliography on page 149).

\* \* \* \* \*

# Chapter Two

## *The Act of Consecration*

### 1. ENVIRONMENT

*“At the end of these three weeks they should go to confession and Holy Communion with the intention of consecrating themselves to Jesus through Mary as slaves of love. When receiving Holy Communion they could follow the method given later on<sup>1</sup>. They then recite the act of consecration which is given at the end of this book. If they do not have a printed copy of the act, they should write it out or have it copied and then sign it on the very day they make it” (TD 231).*

This advice of Montfort underlines the seriousness that we ought to accord to the act of Consecration itself. Confession and Communion stress the deeply “religious” character of what we are about, and set us face to face with Jesus, to whom we ought to give ourselves “*through the hands of Mary*”.

The “*method*” for Communion to which Montfort refers is a way of living out the aspects “*through Mary*” and “*with Mary*” of the “*interior practice*”. In this way, the link between the act of Consecration and the life with Mary which should follow on this, is brought to our attention.

In asking that we sign the text of our Consecration, written out where possible by the one who makes it, St. Louis Marie is drawing out attention to the very personal character and the solemnity of the undertaking we make<sup>2</sup>. It is a “*contract*” drawn up in proper form, which we must respect.

Montfort adds another piece of advice: “*It would be very becoming if on that day they offered some tribute to Jesus and his Mother, either as a penance for past unfaithfulness to the promises made in baptism or as a sign of their submission to the sovereignty of Jesus and Mary. Such a tribute would be in accordance with each one's ability and fervour and may take the form of fasting, an act of self- denial, the gift of an alms or the offering of a votive candle. If they gave only a pin as a token of their homage, provided it were given with a good heart, it would satisfy Jesus who considers only the*

*good intention*” (TD 232). Let us call to mind the second of the fundamental truths concerning “*true devotion*” to the Blessed Virgin: we belong to Christ and to Mary; this does not depend on us - it is God who has willed it this way (Cf. TD 68-77). When we give ourselves completely to Jesus through the hands of Mary, we are merely recognising, for our own greater good, the dominion and the power which both of them have over us. We should try loyally to live out this belonging and the dependence which follows from it in the use of our faculties and our goods. The “*tribute*” of which Montfort speaks, offered joyfully, should be sufficiently important, according to “*each one’s ability*”, to signify truly the abandonment of all our goods and the will to depend on Christ and his Mother in the use of everything.

## 2. FORMULATION

The process of a full consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, is not tied to any one pre-determined formula. Such a process arises from the heart, and is an act of free will. The essential thing is the deliberate choice to give oneself up totally to Christ, so as to achieve a greater fidelity and, in this particular case, to desire to do it through the intermediary of the Blessed Virgin.

Such an act of will can only be, in the last analysis, an internal thing - as are for example certain resolutions that we may take. However, normally it needs to be translated externally by words, a gesture, a procedure which expresses it for ourselves and bears witness to it before the community of the Church. The consecration puts us, in fact, into a new relationship with the Lord Jesus, with Mary, the Church, and more particularly those people who have made the same journey. It should be added that the external gesture also nourishes and strengthens the interior action as well as expressing it. Different formulae and gestures of consecration have been developed in the course of the ages, making more or less explicit what is contained in consecration: from the simple entrusting of oneself to the protection of the Blessed Virgin, to the consecration known as “the holy slavery of love” towards the Mother of God.

St. Louis Marie de Montfort’s text of consecration is certainly the best known and the most widely practised form around the world, thanks mostly to the spread of his writings (the “Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin” has been translated into around forty languages), but also thanks to the recommendation given it by great spiritual authorities. The formula has come down to us by means of “The Love of Eternal Wisdom”, the treatise



where St. Louis Marie establishes the foundations of his spirituality. The consecration which he proposes in this book is, as it were, its final stage, its crowning.

If the method of consecration laid down by Montfort in this text has made its mark in this way, and remains so popular, it is because it has been found particularly good at guaranteeing fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the demands of baptismal life. It is set apart from many other “consecrations” by its doctrinal framework, its spiritual thrust and its radical nature. There are, in fact, four main characteristics in the act of consecration proposed by Montfort.

It is addressed directly to Jesus Christ, the one and only Saviour. There is no consecration to anyone but God, or more precisely to Jesus Christ, for no-one can go to the Father except through him.

It is addressed to Jesus Christ as a free and voluntary renewal of the commitments made to him in baptism, in view of a more generous fidelity to them.

This renewal of baptismal consecration is made with Mary as intermediary, the Mother Jesus gave to us to help us to live out our condition as children of God, and to become genuine and perfect disciples.

It is a total consecration: we give ourselves completely, body and soul; and we give all that we have: material and spiritual goods, without reserve and without any taking back. It is impossible to go further in the matter of self-giving.

The text of the consecration given by St. Louis Marie, is fundamental and a perfect example for us. It is quite natural that we should give it a very special preference, because of its own internal spiritual value, but also because of its links with the whole body of the apostolic spirituality of our guide and teacher.

Having said that, the act of consecration of oneself to Jesus through Mary, could be expressed in other formulae. There are always a number of ways of expressing what we want to say, and we could well imagine that everyone would be able to translate their own journey in a personal text. However, this would not be fully in the spirit of Montfort unless it involved those four characteristics we mentioned above.

Because some people do not feel too much at ease with the language of St. Louis Marie (who is a man of his own day), we will ourselves suggest, after his own text, a formula which is very much in his spirit, but more in line with the spiritual language used today.

## **CONSECRATION OF ONESELF TO JESUS CHRIST, INCARNATE WISDOM, THROUGH THE HANDS OF MARY<sup>3</sup>**

- Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, most lovable and adorable Jesus, true God and true man, only Son of the eternal Father and of Mary always Virgin, I adore you profoundly, dwelling in the splendour of your Father from all eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, your most worthy Mother, at the time of your incarnation.

I thank you for having emptied yourself in assuming the condition of a slave to set me free from the cruel slavery of the evil one. I praise and glorify you for having willingly chosen to obey Mary, your holy Mother, in all things, so that through her I may be a faithful slave of love.

- But I must confess that I have not kept the vows and promises which I made to you so solemnly at my baptism. I have not fulfilled my obligations, and I do not deserve to be called your child or even your loving slave. Since I cannot lay claim to anything except what merits your rejection and displeasure, I dare no longer approach the holiness of your majesty on my own.

That is why I turn to the intercession and the mercy of your holy Mother, whom you yourself have given me to mediate with you. Through her I hope to obtain from you contrition and pardon for my sins, and that Wisdom whom I desire to dwell in me always.

- I turn to you, then, Mary immaculate, living tabernacle of God, in whom eternal Wisdom willed to receive the adoration of both men and angels.

I greet you as Queen of heaven and earth, for all that is under God has been made subject to your sovereignty.

I call upon you, the unfailing refuge of sinners, confident in your mercy that has never forsaken anyone.

Grant my desire for divine Wisdom and, in support of my petition, accept the promises and the offering of myself which I now make, conscious of my unworthiness.

*I, ....., an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify today through you my baptismal promises. I renounce for ever Satan, his empty promises, and his evil designs, and I give myself completely to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after him for the rest of my life, and to be more faithful to him than I have been till now.*

*This day, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity.*

Accept, gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery to honour and imitate the obedience which eternal Wisdom willingly chose to have towards you, his Mother. I wish to acknowledge the authority which both of you have over this little worm and pitiful sinner. By it I wish also to thank God for the privileges bestowed on you by the Blessed Trinity.

I solemnly declare that for the future I will try to honour and obey you in all things as your true slave of love.

- O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as his slave now and for always, so that he who redeemed me through you, will now receive me through you.

Mother of mercy, grant me the favour of obtaining the true Wisdom of God, and so make me one of those whom you love, teach and guide, whom you nourish and protect as your children and slaves.

Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom, that I may become, through your intercession and example, fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth, and with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen.

(LEW 223-227)

**TOTAL CONSECRATION OF ONESELF  
TO JESUS CHRIST  
BY THE MATERNAL INTERVENTION OF MARY**

*in the spirit of St. Louis Marie de Montfort  
(Anonymous Montfortian author<sup>4</sup>)*

Lord Jesus,

Well-beloved only Son sent by the Father to fulfil the eternal plan devised by his love,

Who took flesh in Mary to take on our condition as human beings and to become the servant of all,

Whom the Spirit consecrated and sanctified in fullness and led to the witness of supreme love on the Cross,

**TO YOU BE PRAISE AND GLORY FOR EVER!**

You are the Word of truth which sets us free, the Wisdom which opens up for us the way of happiness, the Life which gives everlasting life in this New World of yours.

To give us a share in your life as a child of the Father, in the Church which is your Body, you, the only Son, came to be united to us in the depths of our poverty, our weakness, and our sin. You have given us new birth in the Spirit in the waters of Baptism, and you have called us to follow you along the twin paths of love of God and of our brothers and sisters.

**TO YOU BE PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING FOR EVER!**

Alas! Lord Jesus, I have failed in my promises and in living up to the demands of my life as a child of God. Too often, I have turned away from your Gospel to follow the paths of false wisdom. I have done evil in the sight of God my Father, I have done wrong to my brothers and sisters, and to myself.

I publicly confess my infidelities, my selfishness, my pride; and I ask for your merciful forgiveness.

**HEAR ME, AND TAKE PITY ON ME, A SINNER!**

Today, I want to change my life and put myself once again in your footsteps, to follow you with a new heart, more faithful and generous.

It is my desire that, henceforth, without any hindrance from me, you might accomplish in me and, through me, in my brothers and sisters, your work of liberation, grace and peace.

I want to let myself be led by your Spirit in the paths of the wisdom of love, so as to be united with you, through your Cross, in an eternal Easter.

That is why, conscious of my weakness and my poverty when faced with life, and with my human and apostolic responsibilities at this moment in the life of the world and of the Church, I wish, following the example that you yourself have given me in your Incarnation, to surrender myself entirely to the influence of Mary, your Mother. Since it was your will that she should also be my Mother, I want to allow myself to be shaped by her as your true and perfect disciple.

Graciously accept, Lord Jesus, the total consecration of myself and the commitments I wish to make to you through her.

O Immaculate Mary, marvel of true humanity and of divine grace, bright sign of what we are all called to become in the presence of God, I GREET YOU AND I BLESS YOU!

O Mary, woman blessed among all women, chosen to conceive and bring forth the Saviour of humankind, I PROCLAIM YOU BLESSED!

O Mary, humble Servant of the Lord, docile to his Spirit and faithful to the end in your maternal commitment towards Jesus for the work of Redemption, I PRAISE YOU AND I THANK YOU!

I recognise and declare that, as Mother of Jesus, you are, by the same token, Mother of the Church and my Mother. So as to belong entirely to the Saviour, your Son, and to follow and serve him faithfully as you did, I wish from now on to give myself fully to you, to open myself fully to you in my life, and to let you fulfil the maternal mission confided to you by Jesus in my regard.

O Mary, my Mother, in your presence, and through you, I thank Jesus for the grace of my baptism. Through your maternal hands, I renew my commitment to follow him according to his commandment of love and the demands of my Christian life. I renounce for ever Satan, sin, and all that could lead me to evil, or turn me away from God or my brothers and sisters.

Since you are my true Mother, and so that you might form Jesus in me and me in him, I give myself to you without reserve. I hand over and consecrate to you my whole being, my body and soul, my faculties and my heart, my goods, both spiritual and material; and I leave to you, for you to dispose of freely for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, the spiritual value of all my actions and sufferings.

O Mary, my Mother, help me to grow, as Jesus did, in wisdom and grace in the sight of God and mankind. I want to live close to you, as small as a child, and to let myself be taught by the Word of your Son, and invaded by the Spirit which burns in his heart, so as to be able to love all my brothers and sisters, and especially those who have the greatest need of being understood and helped.

You who found grace before God for each and every one, and who never cease to intercede as a mother for us, give me a share of your faith in Jesus, despite the difficulties and dark moments in my life; give me a share in your hope in him, going beyond my trials and failures; give me a share in your love for him, so that I may always do what he asks of me in the service of God and my brothers and sisters.

O Mary, my Mother, support me with your prayer, and form Jesus in me. Then, he will be able to accomplish in me and through me, in the power of his Spirit of love, his work of grace and salvation, and lead me to the final encounter with him in the glory of the Father.

### **3. CELEBRATION**

After a suitable preparation, it is time to enter on the next step, consecration. This is an important moment, for this step is the gateway to a new filial relationship with Mary, and through her to a more intimate relationship of belonging and dependence with Jesus, and the starting point for a new style of evangelical life. It is fitting that this importance should be underlined by the way the consecration is carried out: the day chosen, the place where it is done, the surrounding circumstances...

Having said that, this step can be taken alone or in a group, at home or in church, on the occasion of a personal or family event, in the course of a pilgrimage or at the end of a retreat, during a celebration of the Word. While it is traditional to choose, preferably, a feast of our Lord or our Lady (“a special feast-day”, as Montfort puts it), the circumstances can vary according to personal choice or the opportunities available in time or place; however, it is always desirable that they should underline the importance, if possible in a festive way, of the step being taken.

Care should be taken to set up and decorate a good statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin, with flowers, lights, etc... Also candles should be provided for the moment of consecration itself (as is done at the renewal of baptismal vows in the Easter Vigil).

If Montfort’s own text is used, it is suggested that the reading of the act of consecration should be split into several separate parts, for example as follows:

- 1) The prayer addressed to Jesus, which itself can be divided into:
  - a) Adoration / Thanksgiving (“Eternal and incarnate Wisdom... faithful slave of love.”)
  - b) Confession of infidelity and the desire to change (“Eternal and incarnate Wisdom... that wisdom whom I desire to dwell in me always.”)
- 2) The greeting addressed to Mary (“I turn to you, then, Mary... conscious of my unworthiness.”)

3) The consecration itself, including the renewal of baptismal promises (“I, ... , an unfaithful sinner... obey you in all things as your true slave of love.”)

4) The final prayers addressed to Mary (“O admirable Mother... with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen.”)

### **Example of Consecration during a celebration of the Word<sup>5</sup>**

- Entrance:
  - \* a hymn addressed to Christ or to Mary
  - \* reading by everyone of part 1)-a)
  - \* reprise of the refrain or of a verse of the hymn.
- Penitential Rite:
  - \* invitation by the celebrant
  - \* reading by all of part 1)-b)
  - \* singing of a *Kyrie*.
- Prayer of the celebrant
- A reading, either from Sacred Scripture, or, since this is not a liturgical celebration, an extract from one or other of the writings of St. Louis Marie, for example: LEW 203-206; TD 32-33; 120-121; SM 17-21, ...
- Responsorial Psalm after the reading: a refrain addressed to Mary, repeated after the reading of the threefold greeting in part 2) of the text.
- A reading from the Gospel (e.g. Lk 1, 26-38; Jn 1, 1-12; or Jn 19, 25-27).
- Homily after the Gospel.
- The consecration itself, in part 3), the text to be read by all, with lighted candles in their hands.
- After the Act of Consecration, there might be a somewhat prolonged Prayer of the Faithful (with intentions *ad libitum*) or a meditated Rosary.
- The final prayers to Mary in part 4) of the text.

This is the moment when those who have just made their consecration sign their “act of consecration” (renewal of the “*covenant contract*” of baptism), as Montfort asks; they might also, at this moment, make the “*tribute*” (offering) he asks for, as a symbolic sign of the desire to belong to her.

If the consecration, as planned, is to include a request to enter the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts, this would be the moment to

hand over to the new members their certificate of membership and the badge or medal of the Association.

- The celebration might end with the singing of the *Magnificat*.

## 4. RENEWAL

### a) Its importance

*“Every year at least, on the same date, they should renew the consecration following the same exercises for three weeks. They might also renew it every month or even every day by saying this short prayer: ‘I am all yours and all I have is yours, O dear Jesus, through Mary, your holy Mother.’”* (TD 233).

Montfort is well aware that, in spite of our fervour at certain moments, we can easily forget our best resolutions, and let our generosity fade. So we have to take the necessary means not to stop on our journey. One of these means is precisely the renewal of our consecration. Annual renewal, on the anniversary of our first consecration, should be done, according to him, with a certain solemnity, at least in the heart of the one doing it, even if it cannot be shown in an external way. Montfort also recommends that we look again, during three weeks, at the themes he proposed for the initial preparation.

Each one has to look to this according to their means and opportunities. But a consecrated person who really wants to live out the gift of himself or herself which he or she has made, will be anxious to take the time available to get back each year to their attitude before themselves, before Mary and before Christ. They might, in this way, take stock and look for the means to make further progress.

But that, in itself, is not enough. It is *“every month or even every day”* that we need to renew our consecration. The short formula proposed by Montfort is excellent, for it sums up very well what is essential. Also, its very direct character lets us enter into immediate contact with Jesus and Mary. It might also be useful in helping us to live constantly with Mary, so as to live with Jesus, as Montfort asks (cf. TD 259). And then it is up to each one to find simple personal means to recall his or her state as a consecrated person, and its demands.



## **b) Recommended Prayers**

Apart from those suggested above by Fr. de Montfort himself, each person will find their own little formulae. But we might further suggest:

### **A daily renewal of the Consecration to Jesus through Mary**

O Mary Immaculate, Queen of our Hearts,

I, *N.....*, an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify today through you my baptismal promises. Once again, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity.

### **Offering of the Day**

O Mary, my Mother and Queen, I offer you in a special way this day, that you may unite it with the Offering of Jesus on the altars the world over. I place in your hands my prayers and my work, my joys and sorrows. May everything that is in me today be, with you and through you, a thing of love and service to the Lord Jesus, that his Reign may come to be in the hearts of all.

### **Brief prayers throughout the day**

Lord, I am your servant, the son of your Handmaid (Ps 115,16).

Lord, let it be done to me according to your Word, as it was for Mary, your Servant (Lk 1,38).

Lord Jesus, I am all yours, and all that I have I offer to You through Mary, your holy Mother, whom you have given to me to be my Mother and my Mediatrix with you.

O Mary, my tender Mother, I am all yours, and all that I have belongs to you. Do with me what you will, for Jesus.

## **5. LITURGICAL FEASTS TO BE CELEBRATED IN A SPECIAL WAY**

The Christian who is “consecrated to Jesus through Mary” goes on his way, as do all the baptised, according to the rhythm of the Church’s life.

“Christ’s Mother... constantly ‘precedes’ the Church in her journey through human history” (*Redemptoris Mater* 49).

The passage of the consecrated person through the liturgical year is punctuated more particularly by certain feasts which make him or her more sensitive to the presence and the maternal role of the Blessed Virgin. Four of these feasts call for special consideration here.

### **a) The Annunciation (25 March)**

St. Louis Marie de Montfort has this to say to those who have made their consecration: “*Loving slaves of Jesus in Mary should hold in high esteem devotion to Jesus, the Word of God, in the great mystery of the Incarnation, March 25th, which is the mystery proper to this devotion, because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit for the following reasons: a) That we might honour and imitate the wondrous dependence which God the Son chose to have on Mary, for the glory of his Father and for the redemption of man. This dependence is revealed especially in this mystery where Jesus becomes a captive and slave in the womb of his Blessed Mother, depending on her for everything. b) That we might thank God for the incomparable graces he has conferred upon Mary and especially that of choosing her to be his most worthy Mother. This choice was made in the mystery of the Incarnation. These are the two principal ends of the slavery of Jesus in Mary.*”(TD 243).

### **b) The Immaculate Conception (8 December)**

St. Louis Marie does not give us a great deal to use in our celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. He speaks of “*Mary Immaculate*” (LEW 224), of “*Mary, holy and immaculate*” (SM 17), of Mary as “*the direct and immaculate way to Jesus*” (TD 50; cf. 64, 158, 218), as “*immaculate Mother of the God-Man*” (TD 145), as a “*most holy place,*” consisting “*of only virgin and immaculate soil*” (TD 261); she is the “*beautiful, pure and immaculate spouse*” (PE 25), “*She is born immaculate*” (Hymn 75); and is addressed by him: “*Hail, Mary, pure in your conception*” (Hymn 90). Finally, in the **Rule of the Forty-Four Virgins**, he lays down that they should “*meet in church four times a year on the following feasts of our Lady: the Annunciation, the Sunday within the octave of the Assumption, the Immaculate Conception and the Purification.*” (no. 4). It is clear from this brief overview, that he had no difficulty in accepting the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin (at a time when theologians were still disputing about it), that he seems to see this privilege as closely connected

with the divine Motherhood (“*immaculate Mother of the God-Man*”), that he links the adjective “immaculate” with sanctity and the absence of sin, and that this quality makes Mary a direct and sure way to Jesus, which allows the establishment of a discrete but real relationship with the consecration and the way it should be lived out.

According to Montfort, Mary is the only pure creature to whom we can fearlessly give everything, and confide all that we want to give to Jesus. By the grace of her Immaculate Conception, she was delivered from all selfishness, and all attachment to herself. Wholly transparent, “*entirely relative to God*”, she can do nothing but pass on to him all that we give her (cf. TD 225).

### **c) Christmas**

The feast of Christmas, dear to all Christians, is especially so to St. Louis Marie. He wrote ten Hymns to celebrate it (Hymns 57 to 66), one of which, the 7th, is called *The Carol of the Children of Mary*. In it his heart overflows with feelings of wonder at this Mother of the divine Child. The mystery of the Child-God, the mystery of the holy Mother of God, the mystery of poverty and littleness: these are the aspects we love to contemplate and pray over, with Montfort. Completely consecrated to Mary as her children and slaves of love, we love to stay close to her at the Crib: seeing with her eyes, loving with her heart.

### **d) St. Louis Marie de Montfort (28 April)**

His feast invites us to look afresh, in our Gospel journey, at the guide who has taught us to walk in the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin Mary in our following of Jesus. This is the one whom Pope John Paul II sees as a “Witness and Guide” in the Church today, and whose fervent disciple he himself is. Thanking the Lord for such a “Guide” given to our age, we will take delight, on his liturgical feast, in deepening our understanding of his teaching, and we will pray to him to obtain for us the grace of an ever more generous fidelity to the spirit of our consecration.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE MOTHER OF THE DISCIPLES

“Her Son explicitly extended His Mother's maternity in a way that could easily be understood by every soul and every heart by designating, when He was raised on the cross, His beloved disciple as her son. The Holy Spirit inspired her to remain in the Upper Room, after our Lord's ascension, recollected in prayer and expectation, together with the apostles, until the day of Pentecost, when the Church was to be born in visible form, coming forth from darkness.

“Later, all the generations of disciples, of those who confess and love Christ, like the apostle John, spiritually took this Mother to their own homes, and she was thus included in the history of salvation and in the Church's mission from the very beginning, that is from the moment of the Annunciation. Accordingly, we who form today's generation of disciples of Christ all wish to unite ourselves with her in a special way...

“We believe that nobody else can bring us as Mary can into the divine and human dimension of this mystery of the Redemption). Nobody has been brought into it by God Himself as Mary has.”

Pope John Paul II – Encyclical *“The Redeemer of Man”*, no. 22

# Chapter Three

## *Montfortian Associations*

### **1. MONTFORT AND THE ASSOCIATIONS OF HIS OWN DAY**

St Louis Marie de Montfort was anxious to supply those who had renewed the promises and vows of their baptism, through Mary, during his missions, with the means to ensure their perseverance. The “*Covenant Contract*” was the most important of these. But, having a very profound sense of church, he was well aware that the Christian, far from being an isolated being, was part of a community, which he needs and towards which he has certain duties. As a missionary he had also an acute perception of the fact that baptism consecrates a person to Jesus Christ and to his service: “*Baptism made us in very truth slaves of Jesus. We must therefore live, work and die for the sole purpose of bringing forth fruit for him...*” (TD 68).

The community which is the Church, at all its levels (parish, diocesan, national, universal), has always seen the birth among its members of various groupings, associations, movements, which are of use to those members for their spiritual life or for the apostolic activity they feel themselves called to.

In Montfort’s day, there were many “confraternities”, either suited to various categories of people (as, for example, the Society of Virgins, the Association of St. Michael for soldiers), or bringing together various baptised Christians by reason of their spiritual affinity (as, for example, the Rosary Confraternity, which he valued so highly).

Montfort emphasised very strongly the community dimension of apostolic activity. The band of apostles gathered round Jesus is, for him, the example to which all those called to continue the “mission” must look. This was true especially for the missionaries of the Company of Mary, of whom he demanded that they live “*in an apostolic manner*”, that is, taking for their model in their way of life and in their activities, the band of apostles, sharing the filial trust Jesus showed towards his Father, in a total abandonment to Providence, putting everything into the common purse, and free from

anything which might tie them down, so as to give themselves completely to the Mission and the coming of the Kingdom. The *Prayer for Missionaries*, the *Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*, and the *Manuscript Rule* written for the missionaries, are first of all addressed to the members of the Company of Mary, it is true. But the ideal which St. Louis Marie expresses in them, can be an inspiration for all those who want to follow the spiritual way which he proposes. All those consecrated to Jesus through Mary are called to gather together under the aegis of our Lady, according to their state in life and their capacity, to commit themselves, under her guidance, to the mission field entrusted to the Church. Montfort hoped for “a mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women...” (TD 114). This passage is a clear indication that his call and his hopes are not only concerned with priests. In any case, we know that he was quite accustomed to calling on lay people for his apostolic work.

Many movements, groups and even Institutes (sometimes linked in some way with the Company of Mary, in other cases quite independent of it), have adopted the path proposed by St. Louis Marie de Montfort, in order to find Christ through Mary. This is particularly true of the *Legion of Mary*.

St. Louis Marie also wished that those who would make their personal consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary, might find some kind of “*confraternity*” which would help them to live it out: “*Those who desire to take up this special devotion, (which has not been erected into a confraternity, although this would be desirable)...*” (TD 227). His wish has been fulfilled, and those who make their consecration can today join the Montfortian Association of “*Mary Queen of All Hearts*”.

This call by the saint is still heard today in the hearts of many. Everywhere, there is, for those who so desire, the possibility of being enrolled directly in the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts, which we are now going to describe.

## **2. THE ASSOCIATION OF MARY QUEEN OF ALL HEARTS**

### **a) An historical note**

It was in Canada in 1889, that the confraternity wished for by Montfort first saw the light of day, with the name of “*Confraternity of Mary Queen of*

*All Hearts*". This title, "*Queen of All Hearts*", was one dear to Montfort himself, and it emphasises very well the voluntary character of the relationship which links to Mary all those who consecrate themselves to her Son through her.

Similar confraternities sprang up very quickly, in France and many other countries of Europe and America, and in certain countries in Asia and Africa. On 28 April 1913, a decree issued by Pope Pius X conferred on the confraternity in Rome the title of Archconfraternity, and from that time on all the other confraternities had to be attached to this one. In 1965, some 140 centres existed, spread all over the world, some of them counting tens of thousands of members.

According to the statutes of the Confraternity, this was to be its aim: "*This Confraternity has as its aim, to establish and spread the reign of Mary in souls, so as to enable Jesus Christ to reign more perfectly there.*" The consecration, as far as possible made in accordance with the formula laid down by Fr. de Montfort, was required for membership. It was also recommended that it be renewed every day, and that the members should make every effort to live in dependence on Mary.

Parallel with the Confraternity, an "*Association of Priests of Mary, Queen of All Hearts*" had been set up in 1907. The following was the double aim suggested for the priests by its statutes: "*1. To sanctify their priestly lives by the practice of the perfect devotion to Mary as taught by Blessed de Montfort; 2. To make this devotion their principal apostolic means for the establishment, through Mary, of the reign of Jesus, both in individuals, and in the family and society in general.*" Pope Pius X was the first to be entered in the register of this association, and he encouraged its growth. The *Revue des prêtres de Marie Reine des Coeurs* strove to make it better known, and it did spread, especially in France, but also in Italy, England, Spain, Colombia, Mexico and Vietnam.

It has to be admitted that these two Associations suffered a certain decline after the second World War, which therefore demanded efforts at renewal. In 1956, on 5 July, new statutes were approved. The *Association of Priests of Mary Queen of All Hearts*, until then considered as a branch of the Confraternity, became an independent association. The two Associations were henceforth considered as "*proper to the Company of Mary*", depending on it in the same way as a Third Order in relation to a Religious Order. And finally, their apostolic nature was emphasised, linked with the mission of the Company of Mary.

The period of renewal following on the Vatican Council, made its mark on the thinking with regard to these two Associations, and has resulted

in new statutes being drawn up. The two Associations have also been reunited in one Association “Mary Queen of All Hearts” (Cf. Decree, pg. 147).

## **b) The current statutes**

Since it is desirable that those who take up the spiritual way recommended by Montfort by the consecration should be enrolled in the Association, we give here the new text of the Statutes, drawn up in conformity with the directives of Vatican II and the new Code of Canon Law.

# **STATUTES OF THE MONTFORTIAN ASSOCIATION OF ”MARY QUEEN OF ALL HEARTS”**

## **1. Nature and purpose**

**Art. 1 - The Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts** gathers together the faithful, clerics or lay, who, desiring to be *witnesses to the truth of the Gospel*<sup>1</sup>, intend to live the commitments of their Baptism with the help of a total consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary. To this end, they commit themselves to the *perfect practice of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin* taught by Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, whom they choose as *spiritual Guide and Master*.<sup>2</sup>

**Art. 2 - §1 -** Organically united to the Company of Mary, the **Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts** does not possess any autonomous juridical structure.<sup>3</sup> Its members participate, each in his or her own life situation, in the mission of the Montfortians in the Church: **to prepare the Reign of Jesus through Mary**<sup>4</sup>.

§ 2 - **The Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts** is thus an “extension” of the Company of Mary, not in the sense that the Congregation would seek to recruit all for itself, but rather that “in the near or distant future the Blessed Virgin will have more children, servants and slaves of love than ever before, and that through them Jesus Christ, my beloved Master, will reign more than ever in the hearts of men and women.”<sup>5</sup>

§ 3 - The Association is thus not at the service of the Company of Mary but, with the Company of Mary, at the service of the Queen, the service of the holy Church, the service of souls, the service of the people of God, the service of the **Reign of Jesus through Mary**.



## Centres

**Art. 3** - The international centre of **the Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts** is established at the General House of the Company of Mary. Each country may have a national (regional, ...) centre erected by the Superior General or his delegate.

**Art. 4** - § 1 - The Superior General of the Company of Mary is the Director General of the **Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts**. He has the power to name, for the various centres, a national, regional, or local director delegate.

§ 2 - If the Superior General desires to name a secular priest as director of a centre of the Association, he must first obtain the accord of the Ordinary of this priest; in the case of a religious priest who is not a Montfortian, he will first ask authorisation of the Major Superior of this religious.

## *Role of the Directors*

**Art. 5** - § 1- The Director General communicates to the Directors of the Centres directives and instructions which he judges useful and sees to their application.

§ 2- It belongs to the Director General to authorise the erection of new centres; equally it belongs to him to examine and approve, with the consent of his councillors, the statutes of each centre.

**Art. 6** - § 1- The Directors of the Centres are at the service of the members of the Association, in order to help them to better know and deepen, and to better live the spiritual path passed on by Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort. They encourage them to have a perfect baptismal fidelity, that is, a faithful following of Christ, who is Wisdom Eternal and Incarnate for the salvation of the world, by means of a total abandonment of oneself to her through whom, by the all powerful action of the Holy Spirit, He desired to come to us.

§ 2- They will recall to the members their duty - especially by the example of their lives - to make others around them know this path of life, so that **the Reign of Jesus through Mary** might come even more.<sup>6</sup>

**Art. 7** - If the members have a true right to receive the formation which they need and which they have come to seek, the directors have the obligation to provide directly or indirectly for their initial and ongoing formation.<sup>7</sup>

To this end, the Superior General will take care to prepare or have prepared a programme or a manual, where he will establish with clarity the stages to cover before the candidate may be enrolled in the Association, as

well as the obligations of ongoing formation. He will submit the programme or the manual to the judgement and approbation of the general council.

## Members

**Art. 8** - The **Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts** is open to all the faithful (lay persons, clergy, religious) who desire to engage themselves in the spiritual and apostolic journey proposed by Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort. For religious can 307, §3 will be taken into account.

**Art. 9** - One who, after the necessary formation and preparation, pronounces the consecration to Jesus, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, by the hands of Mary, according to the formula of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, may be received into the Association.

The incorporation is made, following the motivated request of the candidate and acceptance by the Director, at the moment when the consecration is made in the presence of the Director or his delegate and its inscription in the register of the Association.

## Commitments

**Art. 10** - The consecration by which a person engages himself or herself in the Association implies the commitment to live, in one's own state of life, in one's own milieu, in one's own work, the spirit and the spirituality left us by Montfort. The members will seek to make it the heart of their lives, impregnating all their activities and apostolate.

Renewing their consecration each day, members collaborate, according to their possibilities and their own condition, in the apostolate of the Company of Mary following the directives of the Director General.

**Art. 11** - For the members who might desire such, the Director General could create, within the Association:

- a group of associates who commit themselves by promises or by vows, according to their state in life, to live the evangelical counsels in the spirit and the spirituality of Saint Louis-Marie;

- groups who commit themselves to a specific apostolate, always with the spirit and the spirituality of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort.

**Art. 12** - The Director General will prepare, to this end, particular statutes which respond both to the call of these members and to the nature of the Association. It belongs to him, with his councillors, to examine and to approve them, if they are judged apt to guide the faithful on the path that leads to Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus, Son of God and of Mary.

## **Sharing of spiritual goods**

**Art. 13** - By their entrance into the Association, the members are in spiritual communion with the entire Montfortian Family. They delight in celebrating the liturgical feasts which are the sign and fulfilment of this communion: the Annunciation of the Lord, March 25th, is the principal feast of the Association<sup>8</sup>. The Nativity, December 25th; the Immaculate Conception, December 8th; and the feast of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, April 28th, are also celebrated with a special character by the members of the Association.

The members participate as well in the spiritual riches which Mary pours out on the Montfortian Family, she “*who gives herself completely in a wondrous manner to those who give themselves completely to her.*”<sup>9</sup>

**Art. 14** - Entrance into the Association creates a reciprocal bond of fraternity and solidarity among all the members of the Montfortian Family. The new member participates in the joys and sorrows of this new family. If one is happy to drink from the spiritual treasures of this family, one strives to enrich it more by prayer and the offering of one’s life animated by the Montfortian consecration.

## **Modification of the Statutes**

**Art. 15** - With the consent of his councillors, the Superior General may bring to the present Statutes, approved by the Holy See, modifications which do not touch the nature and purpose of the Association. *Servatis caeteris de jure servandis.*

### **c) Some comments on the text of the Statutes**

#### ***a) The vital link with the Company of Mary***

This text calls for a few comments, notably on the “vital link” which unites the associates with the Company of Mary.

Both history and experience show that many people can adopt what might be called the essential Marian aspect of Montfortian spirituality, and make efforts to let their whole Christian life be affected by it, without necessarily adhering, with equal passion, to other elements brought out by St. Louis Marie. The same does not apply to those who profess a more radical dependence with regard to his spiritual teaching as a whole. This is obviously true for, among others, the Company of Mary.

Those who, having made their consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary, ask to be enrolled in the register of the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts, accept, by that very fact, to enter organically into relationship with the Company of Mary. Since the Association is like “an extension” of this Montfortian congregation, there is an immediate twofold consequence for its members: “to live in the spirit of Montfortian spirituality as practised in the Company of Mary” and to support its apostolic activity.

### ***b) To live in the spirit of the Company of Mary***

To make a commitment to the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts is to enter into a family: that of the Company of Mary. It becomes necessary to learn to know this family, so as to live by its spirit, to share in the spirituality by which it lives. The Centres to which the members belong are there precisely to supply the members with the means to discover more and more the richness of Montfort and of his teaching, the life of the Company of Mary and its activities.

Hence the ideal is to be able to take part in the life and meetings of a Centre which is living and well-organised. This is not always the case. So what is to be done then?

There are various possibilities, beginning with the Montfortian magazines and publications, by means of which it is possible to nourish one's life as a consecrated person and an associate.

Experience has shown also that some associates, priests, religious or lay people, though isolated at the start, have succeeded in making the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts known in their own area, and in setting up a group which could become a Centre, even if there are no Montfort Missionaries in that area to take on the direction of such a centre. The statutes make provision, in fact, for others to be appointed director. This is one way, and a particularly important one, to give effect to the other commitment made: to be “*with the Company of Mary, at the service of the Queen, the service of the holy Church, the service of souls, the service of the people of God, the service of the **Reign of Jesus through Mary***” (Statutes art 2., §3).

### ***c) To support and extend the apostolic activity of the Company of Mary***

The Company of Mary has a missionary dimension which, in the vision of St. Louis Marie, is an essential one for it. Since they are truly members of the family, called to live according to its spirit, the members of

the Association ought to be concerned to share in this apostolic spirit, and to take part, according to their own state in life and what is possible for them, in the “*mission of the Montfortians in the Church*” (art.2, §1).

“*According to their possibilities and their own condition*” (art.10): There is at least one aspect which is valid for all, namely, prayer and the offering up of their life to support the work of the Montfort Missionaries. It is a source of extraordinary strength for them to know that they can really count on this spiritual support by the associates, especially when, in certain countries and certain circumstances, they meet with great difficulties or trials. Here again, the Superior General of the Company of Mary, who is also Director General of the Association, along with the national and local directors of Centres, can pass on the information and requests which are given. The same is true for the Montfortian magazines.

Many people could engage in an effective participation in the apostolic activity of the Congregation. There are many possible forms of collaboration, depending on the place, circumstances and capacities of those concerned. In some places it will be a question of a direct cooperation in some pastoral activity carried on by the Montfort Missionaries, in other places, simply rendering some material services for this activity, perhaps by raising funds for the carrying out of an apostolic project.

The associates will also not forget that it is up to them to make known in their own neighbourhood, through the witness of their lives as well as their words, the Montfortian spiritual path and the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts.

Since this Association is recognised as “*an extension of the Company of Mary*”, the members share in the mission of the Montfort Missionaries, taking care to support and extend its apostolic activity in their own areas, according to their proper vocation and situation, so as to establish the Reign of Jesus through Mary. These words are important: they speak of the importance for the Company of Mary to be able to count on the associates to extend its apostolic activity, particularly through lay people, who, “*in (their) own state of life*” can act “*in (their) own milieu*”, in a different way from that of missionary priests or religious. Since Vatican II, which shed fresh light on the importance of the active mission of lay people in the Church, and since the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on “*The Lay Faithful*” (*Christifideles Laici*) and what he said in *Vita Consecrata*, the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts can take on all of these dimensions. St. Louis Marie de Montfort, who, in the circumstances of his own day, knew how to appeal to Christians to help him in extending his missionary activity, no doubt rejoices today to see Montfortian associates taking their privileged place in the “*mission*” he entrusted to his Company of Mary.

#### *d) Sharing in spiritual blessings*

This sharing in spiritual blessings consists in everything that the Company of Mary can give to its associates by passing on its knowledge of Fr. de Montfort and his spirituality and its own riches of grace; but it includes also all that it receives from the members of the Association, who, through their prayers, the offering up of their lives and their apostolic commitments, give it a great deal. It goes without saying that this exchange and spiritual communion is also to be found among the associates themselves. It is greatly to be desired that those in charge should draw to the attention of the members this way of living this particular aspect of the family spirit, and should give them the practical means to deepen it, through meetings for the centres, and through the various publications at their disposal.

#### **d) Note on the Indulgence granted to the Association**

As is the case with most spiritual Associations (Confraternities, pious unions, etc....), the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts has been enriched by the Holy See with certain special advantages, among them a special indulgence. This, we should recall, consists in the total or partial remission of the temporal punishment due to sin which has already been forgiven, gained through the fulfilling of certain conditions linked with the Christian life.

##### ***1 - The current teaching of the Magisterium***

While recalling the definition of an indulgence as the remission of the temporal punishment (that is, that which has to be undergone in time, before eternity) due to sins already forgiven, the Church makes it clear that she brings about this remission “by disposing of, and applying with authority, the treasure of the satisfaction made by Christ and the saints.” We say also that the Church supplies from her “treasury”. This remission may be either total or partial **in the intention of the Church** in prescribing some act or other, but also **depending on the dispositions of the one who performs this act**. It is also made clear that the indulgence, whether total or partial, may be applied to oneself or to the souls in Purgatory, but not to other living persons.

In speaking of the interior dispositions of the person, it is clearly a matter – and the texts emphasise this several times – of the charity which informs the carrying out of the action, a charity which has to be enlightened by faith and sustained by hope. With regard to partial indulgences, and with a

view to establishing the extent of the remission (it is no longer a question of indulgences of so many days, months or years), the Church makes her intention clear in the following manner: “To the person who, in a spirit of contrition, performs a work to which is attached a partial indulgence, there is granted by the intervention of the Church that amount of remission of temporal punishment which that person already would receive by his own action.” Let us be clear: Every action done through charity already has in itself a meritorious and satisfactory value, according to the degree of charity which inspires it. The indulgence “doubles” this value which already attaches to the action.

## ***2 - General Indulgences***

Having made that clear, here now are the principal indulgences granted by the Church to all the faithful who fulfil the conditions.

### **1) Plenary Indulgences**

A plenary indulgence is granted on the occasion of the following actions: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least half an hour – the recitation of five decades of the Rosary while meditating on the Mysteries (in church, as a family or in community) – making the Way of the Cross – reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour – the renewal of baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil – the adoration of the Cross during the Solemn Liturgy of the Passion on Good Friday – a Papal Blessing, even received via radio or television. The priest may also grant a plenary indulgence to a well-disposed dying person.

The **conditions** laid down by the Church for obtaining a plenary indulgence (apart from the performance of the indicated action) are: confession and communion (this may be during the preceding or following days) and a prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father (for example, one “Our Father” and one “Hail Mary”).

### **2) Partial Indulgences**

“A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who, while fulfilling their obligations and accepting the trials of life, lift up their souls towards God with humility and confidence, and recite, even if only mentally, a pious invocation.”

The same is granted to one who “led by the spirit of faith and moved by a sense of mercy and charity, gives of himself and his goods to serve his brothers and sisters in their need.”

Also to one who, “in a spirit of penance, deprives himself voluntarily of something which is free and agreeable”, especially (according to one commentary) if this is done to the benefit of one’s neighbour.

There are therefore three kinds of acts: acts of piety, of charity and of penance. Let us recall again this remark made in the “Collection” on the profound intention of the Church in this area: “The aim of the Church’s authority in granting indulgences, is not only to help the faithful to make satisfaction for the punishment due, but also to bring them to carry out acts of piety, of penance and charity, especially those that serve to increase faith and to promote the common good.”

### ***3 – The Particular Indulgence granted to members of the Association***

In reply to a request by the Superior General of the Company of Mary (Montfort Missionaries) – who is also the General Director of the Association – the Holy See granted to the members of the Association, in May 2001 (cf. Decree, pg. 148), a plenary indulgence (on the usual conditions for a plenary indulgence: confession, communion and prayer for the Pope’s intentions), provided that there is no attachment to any sin:

On the day of their enrolment in the Association;

On Holy Thursday;

On Christmas Day;

On the feast of the Annunciation;

On 8 December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception;

On 28 April, the feast of St. Louis Marie de Montfort;

On the first Saturday of each month.

There are no longer any partial indulgences granted **by a special title** to the Association, but the general conditions apply here also (see above). It is sufficient for any member, for example, to renew their consecration frequently during the course of their day<sup>10</sup>, even only mentally, while fulfilling their duties of state, and accepting their daily crosses, for them to obtain a partial indulgence each time they do it. The more intense the fervour of their charity, the more abundant will be the remission of faults.

\* \* \* \* \*



**DECREE OF APPROVAL BY THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF  
RELIGIOUS LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**



CONGREGAZIONE  
PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRAT.  
E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLIC.

Prot. n. L. 15-1/2001

**DECREE**

The Procurator General of the Company of Mary (Montfortians), whose principal seat is in the Diocese of Rome, has requested of the Holy see, in the name of the Superior General and his Council, the re-unification in one Association of the two Montfortian Associations: the “Association of Priests of Mary, Queen of All Hearts” and the “Confraternity of Mary Queen of All Hearts”, declared “Associations proper” to the Company of Mary by a decree (Prot. n. 39/54) dated 16 July 1955.

The Congregation for Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, having carefully examined this request, by the present Decree, establishes the single Association as requested, under the title of

**“MARY, QUEEN OF ALL HEARTS”**

In addition, the same Congregation *approves and confirms the Statutes of the Association*, according to the copy in the French language which is kept in its archives.

Any disposition to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Vatican, 26 April 2001.

Eduardo Card. Martinez Somalo  
Prefect

+ Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti, C.P.  
Secretary

**DECREE OF THE APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY CONFIRMING  
INDULGENCES**



**PAENITENTIARIA APOSTOLICA**

**Prot. N. 65/01/I**

**HOLY FATHER**

Ivo Libralato, Procurator General of the Montfortian Company of Mary, in the name of the Most Reverend Superior General of the same Congregation and as such Director of the Montfortian Associates of “Mary Queen of All Hearts”, together with his Council, humbly petitions: Since the Congregation for Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, on 26 April last, duly recognised a new Statute for the former Associations, one clerical, the other lay, to be now reunited in one Association to be called the Association of “Mary, Queen of All Hearts”, he requests that the grant of a Plenary Indulgence made by your Holiness, through a Rescript of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on 12 October 1996, granted in perpetuity, might be attributed to the new Association, by which the members might rejoice and receive the fruit of charity on days of piety, consecrating themselves to Christ through Mary, his most sweet Mother, according to the spirit and admirable example of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort.

And may God...

**22nd Day of May 2001**

The APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY, at the behest of the Holy Father, rules that the substance of the above-mentioned Rescript (Prot. N. 119/96/I and N. 120/96/I) be attributed to the new Association of “Mary, Queen of All Hearts”; thus the members may acquire a Plenary Indulgence, provided that, the usual conditions (Sacramental Confession, Holy Communion and Prayer for the Holy Father’s intentions) having been fulfilled and any attachment to any sin being excluded, they promise or renew their promise, at least privately, to faithfully observe their own Statutes, on the following occasions:

1. the day of their enrolment;
2. Holy Thursday; the liturgical celebrations of Christmas and the Annunciation of the Lord; the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the feast of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort; as well as the first Saturday of every month.

The present rescript to be valid **in perpetuity**.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Signed by ...

## MONTFORTIAN BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort

- *God Alone. The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, 631 pgs., Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1988 – This collection of most of the writings of St. Louis Marie, including a number of Indices, helps towards an overall view of his spirituality.
- *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 107 pgs. – Although less well-known than some of his other writings, this basic work is the only one which gives an exact idea of the apostolic thinking of St. Louis Marie and the reason for True Devotion to Mary.
- *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 167 pgs. – The masterpiece of this great Marian teacher, today translated into more than 40 languages, this treasure of Christian spirituality establishes the maternal role of the Blessed Virgin in the divine plan of Salvation, and in the baptismal and apostolic life of the Christian.
- *The Secret of Mary*, 48 pgs. – A brief and easily readable outline of the doctrine presented in the previous work.
- *The Admirable Secret of the Rosary*, 150 pgs. – Montfort, the Apostle of the Rosary, here gives us a glimpse of his teaching on this admirable secret for discovering Mary and, through her, Jesus.
- *Letter to the Friends of the Cross*, 70 pgs. (including a number of prayers) – A powerful commentary on the Mystery of the Cross, both in the life of Jesus and in that of Christians.

### Books explaining his spirituality

- *Jesus Living in Mary. Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, 1380 pgs., Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1994 – contains 88 articles by experts on almost every aspect of Montfort's spirituality, with an index of Subjects, Proper names and Biblical references.
- M. Gendrot, S.M.M., *Make Way for Jesus Christ*, 198 pgs., Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1978 – Extracts from the writings of St. Louis Marie, organised in such a way as to help us to discover his spirituality. A good introduction.

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- E.C. Bolger. S.M.M., *The Man Called Montfort*, 224 pgs., Montfort Press, Liverpool, 1947 (Reprinted 1966) – A popular life of the saint, written in an easily readable style.
- Eddie Doherty, *Wisdom's Fool*, 242 pgs., Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1975 – Another popular life of the saint, written by a well-known American journalist.
- Benedetta Papàsogli, *Montfort, A Prophet for our Times*, 496 pgs., Edizioni Monfortane, Rome, 1991 – A well-written and thoughtful account of the life of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, translated from the Italian

## NOTES

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, published for the Marian Year of 1988, no. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Grandet, *La vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, prêtre missionnaire apostolique*, pg. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Baptiste Blain, *Summary of the Life of L-M Grignion de Montfort*, Documents & Research III, Montfortian International Centre, Rome, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Blain, *op. Cit.*, pg. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Blain, *op. Cit.*, pg. 22.

<sup>6</sup> The word “wisdom”, used by Montfort in various ways, nevertheless has for him two meanings which we could consider essential: the person of Jesus and the “gift” by means of which Christ is communicated to humans. Later we will see the link between these two.

<sup>7</sup> J.-P. Prévost, s.m.m., in “Dossier Montfortain”, Rome, 1986, 1st part, *Montfort et le courant de sagesse biblique*, pg. 6.

<sup>8</sup> J.-P. Prévost, *ibid.*, pg. 1.

<sup>9</sup> NRT, volume 104, *L'exégèse spirituelle de Montfort*, pg. 684.

<sup>10</sup> (Translator's note) The question of the *gender* of “Wisdom” is a difficult one for the English language. The French “Sagesse” is feminine, and it is therefore perfectly natural in French to speak of “*elle*” when referring to Wisdom, even when (as St. Louis Marie does) one applies the name “Wisdom” to the man Jesus Christ. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that in the Old Testament wisdom books, “wisdom” is certainly seen as a feminine figure. In English, however, it feels wrong to speak of “she” and “her” when it is clear that the attribution is to the man Jesus. The solution adopted by this translator is to refer to “Wisdom” as “she” (therefore feminine), except when it is clear that the primary attribution is to Jesus in his incarnation as a man.

<sup>11</sup> We might discuss here a certain use of words (even if it can be attributed to the Bible), and especially the opposition between the demand for justice which comes from the Father and the mercy which would seem to be the prerogative of the Son. Montfort is certainly not deceived by this arbitrary over-simplification (he believes just as much in the goodness of the father as in that of the Son); he may have found this interpretation in various authors, and especially in Poiré, as we can see from his “*Cahier de Notes*”. It serves the purpose here of highlighting the theme of the tenderness of Wisdom towards mankind, and this is what we need to retain.

<sup>12</sup> Letter 6, dated 4 May 1701, to M. Leschassier.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Letter 26.

## Part I

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> (Translator's note) The English translation found in *God Alone* renders this inaccurately (and rather more weakly) “*It is more humble to have an intermediary with Christ.*”

**(Text-box, page 35)**

<sup>2</sup> For certain people, it is true, it becomes an obligation by reason of their belonging to an Institute - or a group - for whom the living out of the perfect practice of true devotion is part and parcel of the conditions of admission.

## Part II

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> We need only look at those texts where Montfort speaks of “sacrifice” and of “making a sacrifice”, applying this to a person or to his goods, to verify this statement. For example, he writes in 1701 to his sister Guyonne-Jeanne, who was at that time a novice with the Daughters of St. Joseph: “*You will only be accepted as a professed Sister of Providence when your abandonment is general and perfect and your sacrifice is complete.*” In the same way, when he is speaking of the gift of oneself by the perfect practice of true devotion: “*Notice that in this devotion we sacrifice to Jesus through Mary all that is most dear to us, that is, the right to dispose of ourselves, of the value of our prayers and alms, of our acts of self-denial and atonements. This is a sacrifice which no religious order would require of its members.*” (SM 29)

<sup>2</sup> So it is that Montfort tells us concerning Jesus in his Incarnation, that “*our Lord, by the sacrifice of himself and of his will, gave more glory to God than he would have given had he offered all the sacrifices of the Old Law*” (TD 248); in the same way, Mary “*gave more glory to God by the smallest of her actions, say, twirling her distaff, or making a stitch, than did St. Laurence suffering his cruel martyrdom on the grid-iron...*” (TD 222).

<sup>3</sup> In his *Prayer for Missionaries for the Company of Mary*, this theme of the glory of God occurs as a kind of leitmotif (PM 6, 14, 18, 23, 28, 30). So the missionaries “*in all the missions they undertake,*” will have as their sole aim “*...to give glory to you for the spoils they have won from your enemies...*” (23). And in the Primitive Rule of the daughters of Wisdom, we read: “*They perform all their actions for the greater glory of God, in union with Jesus and Mary...*” (RDW 203).

<sup>4</sup> In the *Treatise on True Devotion*, the divisions adopted by Montfort do not express so clearly the fact that the “interior practices” are part and parcel of the nature of “the perfect practice”. But we can easily see their importance, and the fact that, without them, something essential would be missing in St. Louis Marie’s “secret”. The fact that the order of the words “through, with, in, for” is different in the *Secret of Mary* and in the *Treatise on True Devotion*, does not raise any particular difficulties, since the spirit and the content are the same.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> We must also take account of the balanced warnings issued by the Council, which “strongly urges theologians and preachers of the word of God to be careful to refrain as much from all false exaggeration as from too summary an attitude in considering the special dignity of the Mother of God”. If these words are addressed above all to those responsible for teaching, nevertheless the faithful are not thereby dispensed from taking account of them. And we can find, in Montfort himself, invitations to prudence, for example in numbers 244-245 of the *Treatise on True Devotion*.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “consecration of oneself” cannot be used in the strong sense except when someone responds to a consecration that God has brought about in that person, and ratifies it consciously, accepting all its consequences. For the first consecration can only come from God, as we see in the baptismal consecration, in which all our personal consecrations are rooted. It is true that the word “consecration” has commonly been used, in a broad sense, for acts of self-giving to Mary which do not have the radicalism that we find in Montfort.

## Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Let us recall, for example, the passage where he tells us that he is “speaking mainly for the poor and simple” (TD 26); or when he affirms: “*I have taken up my pen to write down what I have been teaching with success both publicly and in private in my missions for many years*” (TD 110). It is true that this is to be found in a context where he is speaking directly of “true devotion”. But the “genuine devotee” of Mary of whom he is speaking is very close to the perfect practice and Montfort in fact calls this devotee to this practice, as is shown in nos. 111-113.

<sup>2</sup> The formulation used by Fr. De Montfort may appear complicated, but it should not be rejected. Borrowed from the Liturgy, from the “Eucharistic Prayer”, it expresses a fullness towards which we must tend. The four prepositions used here call for one another and complement one another to translate and penetrate the spirit, the interior attitude which is to be acquired little by little. The words are servants, capable of different tasks, and Montfort does not always give them the same meaning in TD and SM. What is important is the filial attitude of union with Mary, to be gradually approached. This desire for union can be expressed in a very simple formula, even one word, whose content brings together the others. One could say, as some have done: do everything “through Mary”, or “with Mary”, or “in Mary”... The development which follows will help us to discover the depth and breadth and richness of the life of union with Mary to which the consecration introduces us.

<sup>3</sup> See Blain, *Summary of the Life of L-M Grignon de Montfort*, pg. 183.

<sup>4</sup> The expression used in the original French text is “*milieu mystérieux*” (mysterious environment), a phrase meriting some attention. In Mary, inseparable from her Son and from the Holy Spirit, we find the “environment” perfectly suited to our life as children of God, that is, the set of elements and conditions necessary to this life. In this sense, we could say that Mary belongs to the spiritual atmosphere we need to live as children of God (cf. TD 217).

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, no. 58. It is easy to draw a parallel between this passage from TD and the Prayer for Missionaries, in which Montfort asks for missionary priests for the Company of Mary, and where his apostolic enthusiasm breaks out with unstoppable power. These missionaries will draw their apostolic effectiveness from the fact that will be brought to birth and given life through Mary. In fact, they will be: *“true servants of the Blessed Virgin who, like a Dominic of old, will range far and wide, with the holy Gospel issuing from their mouths like a bright and burning flame, and the Rosary in their hands, and bay like your watchdogs, burn like fire and dispel the darkness of the world like a sun. Their inspiration will be their authentic devotion to Mary which will be interior and devoid of all hypocrisy, exterior but not critical, prudent and well-informed, tender without indifference, constant without fickleness, holy without presumption. In this way, they will crush the head of the serpent wherever they go and ensure that the curse you have laid upon it of old will be fulfilled to the letter...”* (Prayer for Missionaries 12).

<sup>2</sup> We should recall that it was this text on the Apostles of the latter times that inspired Frank Duff to found the Legion of Mary. And there is no reason, either, why consecrated lay-people should not be inspired by the spirit of Montfort’s Prayer for Missionaries.

<sup>3</sup> Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, no. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *Cahiers Marials*, no. 110, 15 November 1977, pg. 312.

<sup>5</sup> Apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988, no. 64. This important text might inspire those who have made the consecration and help them to deepen their calling as baptised people dedicated to the apostolate.

<sup>6</sup> Discourse for the closing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the Council. These are the essential passages: *“We are speaking, Venerable Brothers, of a title that is not unknown to the devotion of Christians. Why, especially by this name of their Mother do the faithful and the whole Church love to call upon Mary? Really, this name belongs to the essence of true devotion to Mary, since it rests firmly on the very dignity by which Mary is endowed as Mother of God’s Incarnate Word. We will explain. Just as divine motherhood is the reason why Mary has altogether singular relations with Jesus Christ, and why she is present in the work of human salvation wrought by him, so, likewise, it is especially from divine motherhood that the relations between Mary and the Church flow. Mary therefore precisely as Christ’s Mother must be regarded as Mother also of all the faithful and the Pastors, that is, of the Church”*.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> If we are afraid of the words *“slave”* and *“slavery”*, that is because we forget that it is a matter of a *“slavery of love”*, of which Jesus is the first to give us an example. When Montfort uses these words, he wants to describe the total dependence which we ought to have with regard to Christ and Mary, out of love, in response to their love. This dependence, which is quite the opposite of constraint, leads to the fullness of the liberty of the children of God.



<sup>2</sup> It is clear that Jesus did not remain in a state of “infantile” subjection to Mary until the age of thirty. St. Louis Marie tells us simply that he was the first one to give us an example of filial dependence fully consented to, which we can, at our own level, carry to its furthest consequences by our consecration. Note too that Montfort is well aware, when it is a question of his mission, that it is Jesus who is and remains the Master, even if he wills to continue to have need of the co-operation of his Mother, as the scenes of Cana and Calvary show in St. John’s gospel.

<sup>3</sup> For the Council, see chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*; for Paul VI, the apostolic exhortations *Signum Magnum* and *Marialis Cultus*; for John Paul II, the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

<sup>4</sup> Montfort is content to make the statement without entering into an explanation which runs the risk of becoming a little complicated. The glory Mary now enjoys in heaven is the fruit and reward of her faith; thus she retains all the merit of it, for herself and for us. John Paul II takes up this idea when he says, in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, that the Church shares in the faith of Mary: “*At the basis of what the Church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, in the midst of all the nations of the earth, we find the one ‘who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord’ (Lk 1:45). It is precisely Mary’s faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal Covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ; this heroic faith of hers ‘precedes’ the apostolic witness of the Church, and ever remains in the Church’s heart, hidden like a special heritage of God’s revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the Church share in that mysterious inheritance, and in a sense share in Mary’s faith*” (RM 27).

<sup>5</sup> (Translator’s note) The phrase “*a pure faith*” has been omitted in the English translation of TD.

<sup>6</sup> (Translator’s note) The phrase “*the evil inclinations of your fallen nature*” in the English translation of TD 213, reads in the original “*votre mauvais fond, votre corruption...*”, which would be literally translated (according to *The Oxford Hachette French Dictionary*, 1994) “*your nasty streak, your corruption...*”, or perhaps “*your evil nature, your corruption...*”.

### **Part III**

#### **Chapter 1**

<sup>1</sup> The importance of this step (of making a total consecration of oneself) as a personal commitment, which can only be entered into after mature reflection, explains why it is not good to offer it to children. Only the assured support of a spiritual environment (the family, various groupings), could justify offering it to young people who are of an age to be able to understand its meaning and what it implies.

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the passages in TD which give the impression that a part of Montfort’s manuscript has been lost (TD 227).

<sup>3</sup> *La dévotion à Marie dans l'enseignement des papes*, Éditions de Solemnes, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> This text of a form of preparation is not written by Fr. Bossard.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Cf. TD 266-273

<sup>2</sup> In *The Secret of Mary*, no. 61, Montfort asks that the Consecration be made on “a special feastday”, which again underlines the solemnity of the act.

<sup>3</sup> (Translator’s note) The translation used here is that given in *God Alone, The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Bay Shore, Montfort Publications, 1987, pgs. 112-114.

<sup>4</sup> This formula for Consecration is not written by Fr. Bossard.

<sup>5</sup> In the first edition of this little book, there was to be found here an example (by an anonymous author) of the Consecration made during the celebration of the Eucharist. In line with what was said by Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 31, it seems preferable not to encourage such a way of doing things. Cf. C. Maggioni, *Liturgy*, in *Jesus Living in Mary, Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, pg. 625.

## Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> They are *witnesses to the truth* after the example of Jesus, who claimed before Pilate that he came *to bear witness to the truth* (Jn 18, 37); after the example of all the martyrs, lay people are *Collaborators with the truth* (Cf. 3 Jn 8; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6) – “*The will of the father is that we recognize in every human being Christ our brother, and that we love each one for his good, in word and deed, thus bearing witness to the truth*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 93).

<sup>2</sup> Cf *Redemptoris Mater*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Cr cnn. 303 and 312, § 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. TD 227 and our Constitutions, art. 9 and 39.

<sup>5</sup> TD 113.

<sup>6</sup> Non only priests but “*all the laity must cooperate in the spreading and the growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world... Every lay person ought to be, before the world, a witness of the resurrection and of the life of the Lord Jesus and a sign of the living God*” (*Lumen Gentium*, 35 and 38).

<sup>7</sup> Cf Cn 677, § 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf TD 243.

<sup>9</sup> TD 144.

<sup>10</sup> It is enough to do so by a short formula, such as: “I am all yours, my Jesus, and all that I have is yours, through Mary, your Holy Mother”, or another similar formula.