

MONTFORTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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I. Introduction

Different articles in this Handbook analyze the spirituality that Montfort lived and transmitted through his life and writings. It is not intended that these few pages reproduce or substitute for the other articles. Rather this is an attempt to formulate a synthesis of the spirituality of Saint Louis de Montfort. The Handbook article *Path of Perfection* contains a general introduction to the meaning of “spirituality in the Catholic tradition generally.” We will therefore limit ourselves here to the specific school called Montfortian spirituality.

A number of authors have summarized this path to union with Wisdom. This article will critically examine a few of them (II). We will then present a systematic synthesis of our own (III) and briefly describe the journey into this spirituality in today’s ecclesial context (IV). Finally, we will try to underline certain aspects of contemporary interest in Montfortian spirituality (V).

Montfort certainly accepts the Christian life completely, with its hierarchy of truth and values; he does, however, stress certain elements of Christianity which constitute the pillars of his spirituality: God Alone, Christ-Wisdom, the Cross, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, the apostolic and eschatological dimensions.

During his short life of forty-three years, Montfort did not develop a complete and systematic exposition of his path of perfection. Commentators have attempted to develop

from Montfort such a systematic presentation. One after another, they have offered a range of interpretations which, understandably, reflect each one's historical milieu.

II. Principal Interpretations

A panoramic view of the principal interpretations of Montfortian spirituality permits us to catch a glimpse of the different spiritual movements that developed from the end of the nineteenth century until today. Instead of bringing them together under some common denominator, each will be briefly treated.

1. *The Reign of Jesus through Mary (J. M. Quérard, 1884)*

Father Quérard was convinced that Montfort's earlier biographers did not understand the saint's mission because they did not sufficiently consider the importance of his Marian devotion. He intended to fill this gap by his work, *La Mission Providentielle du Vénérable Louis-Marie de Montfort (The Providential Mission of Venerable Louis Marie de Montfort)*. Written in 1859, about seventeen years after the rediscovery of the TD manuscript, it was only published on the eve of Montfort's beatification.

In essence, the thesis of Quérard consisted in this: to reveal Montfort not only as "a first-class theologian" and the "leader of a new superior theological school" but also as the "precursor of the Second Coming" of Jesus Christ and of the "great epoch of the renewal of Christianity in the world."¹ In order to support his thesis, he stressed that Montfort preached a "perfect" devotion to Our Lady and that he also explained Mary's role in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Montfort is distinguished from his predecessors (Bérulle, Olier, Boudon) – Quérard affirms – in that he teaches devotion to Mary, the Holy Slavery, as "a perfect and new method." It is a "superior devotion" that, far from being introspective, "extends itself to every facet of Christian life." A devotion that "implies all the other devotions. . . . It contains all of them." Furthermore, this devotion is not an occasional act but rather a constant attitude, which "puts us in continual relationship with the Blessed Virgin, because we do not breathe, so to speak, except through her . . . and, as a result, simultaneously in Jesus Christ."² In order for us to live this devotion, the Rosary takes on such an importance that Montfort consecrated a whole book to it, SR.

Perfect devotion to Mary has as its aim the reign of Jesus Christ, or his Second Coming into this world. This coming – as Quérard affirms – "will be grandiose, this second and last coming . . . will be glorious." It "represents a length of time, the end times, a period of centuries perhaps." The author offers us an interpretation that we do not find in the writings of Montfort: Quérard believes that the reign of Mary and of Jesus "will perhaps lead . . . up to this mysterious era of a thousand years of the book of Revelation, when Christ will reign on earth with some of the just."³ As proof of his hypothesis, Quérard brings up a text (erroneously) attributed to Montfort, "Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary for young children in the form of a Catechism with questions and answers," which affirmed that the Blessed Virgin "will return [to earth] at the end of the world with her Son."⁴ And Quérard concludes, in line with a spiritual millenarianism: "It is thus that the apostle of the end times ties into all his writings this mysterious coming of Jesus and Mary in this world."⁵

The interpretation of Quérard, if we exclude the millenarianist perspective, underlines the eschatological tension of devotion to Mary, strongly focused towards the reign of Jesus in this world. The author only cites LEW once, thus ignoring the sapiential dimension. Further, he does not give us an organic synthesis of all the aspects of Montfortian spirituality.

2. “The Spiritual Life at the School of Blessed L. M. Grignion de Montfort” (A. Lhoumeau, 1901)

In a work published in 1901 and reprinted in 1953 – *La vie spirituelle à l'école du Bienheureux L.M. Grignion de Montfort (The Spiritual Life at the School of Blessed de Montfort)* – Father Lhoumeau, a future superior general of the Company of Mary (1903-1919), proceeds on a more solid theological plane. Like Quérard, he is convinced that he must fill in an empty area. This time, however, it is not a question of the relative silence on the Marian aspect in Montfort but, rather, of the fact that there has not yet been a sufficient emphasis on “the perfect devotion to the Blessed Virgin, called the Holy Slavery to Mary . . . which, according to the thought of St. Louis Mary de Montfort, is a system of spirituality, a special form of interior life, and not only an ensemble of pious practices.”⁶ According to Father Lhoumeau, we should give to Montfort the title “head of a school of spirituality.” Without thinking of TD, and even less of SM, as a “methodical and complete treatise of spirituality,” without pretending that he is teaching a “new” doctrine, we must nevertheless admit that Montfort has truly united “in a homogeneous whole certain points of view in which he more vividly clarified several issues and developed to the limit their practical consequences.” Montfort’s system is original, and we might say that “the spirituality of Father de Montfort is distinguished by a particular form, of which he is the veritable author.”⁷

The thesis of Lhoumeau is that the doctrine of Montfort possesses “a purpose, a means, certain procedures and effects, which have special characteristics and constitute a distinct spirituality.” He demonstrates this thesis in the five parts of his work; the first two treat the doctrinal and the last three are devoted to the spirituality.

The purpose of Montfortian spirituality is union with God considered under the aspect of “Jesus Christ living in us.” Evidently, such a purpose is common to all schools of spirituality. Montfort, however, brings forth a particular aspect: “To make Jesus live in us through that total and absolute dependence that is called Holy Slavery.”⁸

To attain this purpose Mary is the great means. She “is an essential part of Montfortian spirituality . . . because she is the one who gives it its specific form and its distinctive properties. In fact, the formal object of this devotion is the mediation and queenship of Mary; and its proper act is the Consecration. It is called the Holy Slavery of Mary; and that is its true name, which explains its very nature.”⁹ In giving us a “theology of the Virgin Mary” according to Montfort, Lhoumeau insists on the “spiritual maternity” of Mary, “the culminating point, the principal function of her mediation, based on her Divine Maternity.” And he is able to conclude that “in this devotion Mary is seen as Mother.”¹⁰

The “special methods” of Montfortian spirituality are “the two practices, one inner, and the other outer,” which make up “an act of Consecration that is accomplished by the recitation of a formal prayer.” This outer act demands an inner disposition that “will animate all our acts with the spirit of this Consecration and will create in us in a habitual dependence on Mary.”¹¹

The effects of living holy slavery are treated in terms of the different phases of the spiritual life: the purgative way (purification), the illuminative way (progress in virtue) and the unitive way (union with God, transformation of the soul in Mary, filial confidence and freedom, etc.).¹²

This synthesis of Lhoumeau may be considered as the classical interpretation of Montfortian spirituality, the most organic and the most widely accepted in the Church. The author enlightens in a masterly fashion the different aspects of Montfortian spirituality (particularly the Christocentric purpose), and distinguishes this spirituality clearly from any

sort of devotionism. One drawback is that Father Lhoumeau scarcely makes mention of LEW (cited only once) and does not probe deeply enough into Montfort's theology of the Cross; moreover, he could have placed more emphasis on the apostolic dimension of Montfort's spirituality.

3. "The Love of Eternal Wisdom," Powerful Synthesis of Montfortian Spirituality (H. Huré, 1929).

With the *editio typica* of 1929 (the first edition is dated 1856), H. Huré, father general of the Company of Mary, marked a turning point in the interpretation of Montfortian spirituality. Although exuberant about the qualities of TD, the author emphasizes the importance of LEW as the other masterpiece of Montfort. LEW is a "book of capital importance. It is this book and this book alone that gives us Montfortian spirituality as a whole and can even give us a more exact and more comprehensive idea of *True Devotion to Mary*. Only *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* puts us in permanent contact with the end to acquire and with the evangelical asceticism we must possess in order to live as true slaves of Jesus through Mary."¹³

Unlike Father Lhoumeau, Father Huré does not, systematically and in a specific work, present his sapiential interpretation of Montfortian spirituality. His synthesis is found in the introduction and in the footnotes for LEW. He gives precise reasons why LEW "constitutes . . . a most powerful synthesis of spirituality, an entire body of illuminating doctrine capable of bringing about in people not only the reign of Jesus but his perfect reign." He points out the double structure of this work when he distinguishes "the great loving efforts of Divine Wisdom and the entirely loving response of the soul that has listened to, understood, and followed his incredible call."¹⁴ It is then that we understand "that everything begins from Christ Wisdom and everything ends there."¹⁵

Father Huré outlines the idea of Wisdom in Christian spirituality and he concludes from this that "neither before nor after Blessed de Montfort, have we seen a work like his, . . . and constituting such a powerful synthesis."¹⁶ LEW is a veritable treatise that is "not piecemeal." Everything is found there and in an organized way: "The proposed purpose, the nature and manifestations of Wisdom, its effects, its examples, its words or oracles, and the four means to obtain it."¹⁷ Father Huré clarifies well how Wisdom is both person and gift: "The proper object that Blessed de Montfort expounds is, first of all, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Our Savior Jesus Christ. But since this Wisdom is communicated to us through created gifts . . . , he will also speak of an accidental and created Wisdom, which is the communication that the uncreated Wisdom Himself gives to men."¹⁸

Father Huré is careful to add that he does not wish in any way whatsoever to supplant TD. He also underlines "the essential role of . . . [true devotion to Mary] in Montfortian spirituality," making clear that it "loses something of its value and significance if it is not set within the spiritual method of Blessed de Montfort, about which only this treatise openly gives us the design." Father Huré is convinced that "if we consider Marian devotion on its own, as completely autonomous, and totally independent of the treatise on Wisdom, we will certainly not have the same idea as Blessed de Montfort himself had of it. How come? Because *True Devotion* is only a means, directed toward something else: the acquisition of Eternal Wisdom."¹⁹ In summary, "all things begin with Wisdom and end with Wisdom, but pass through Mary, who is the means."²⁰

The merit of this interpretation is undeniable: LEW itself affirms a clear Christocentric-sapiential orientation. And further, the accent placed on the originality of LEW in the context of Christian tradition shows that the spirituality of Montfort may not be

reduced to its Marian dimension, even if this is clearly Christocentric, since one of its essential characteristics remains its sapiential perspective. The weakness of the work of Father Huré is found only in not having developed *ex professo* and in a systematic manner the Montfortian synthesis: he does not bring out the organic coordination of the principal elements that emerge from the whole Montfortian corpus.

4. The Glory of God Alone by Means of Union with Christ and Mary (H. Frehen, 1966-1967)

In a course, never published, on Montfortian spirituality, H. Frehen, a Montfortian theologian who became bishop of Reykjavik († 1986) dealt with the specific elements of Montfortian spirituality, which he considered to be: the greatest glory of God (final end), union with Christ (proximate end), union with Mary (means), and sinful man who renounces himself and gives of himself.²¹ He searched through all the works of Montfort without exception in order to find texts that would embody these essential elements. He cited as prime examples of basic formulas of Montfortian spirituality CG 4; LPM 6; RW 203; H 49: 1-2; H 141:15. His course, therefore, developed the three themes, God, Jesus Christ, Mary.

Resolutely theocentric, Montfort immerses us in the presence of God, in an atmosphere which remains close “both to the majesty of Sinai and to gospel tenderness.” More precisely, he “realized a magnificent synthesis between theodicy and the theological treatise on the Trinity.” In fact, “the initiative of the Trinity, in Montfort’s vision, extends to each and every salvific work understood in its broadest sense, including the Incarnation, the earthly life of Christ, and also the sanctification of man.” Montfort brings out in a special way that “the predominant and first role in the sanctification of man belongs to the Holy Spirit.” It even seems that Montfort is not content with simply “attributing” to the Holy Spirit the sanctification of man in the classical sense: “All works outside the Trinity are common to the three Persons of the Trinity.” Such a doctrine is true for efficient causality, but in the realm of quasi-formal cause, each of the Divine Persons gives Himself in accordance with His personal properties. Mary herself is also considered by Montfort in strict relationship with the Trinity.

After establishing the Christocentrism of Montfort, Frehen reasons: “The principal mystery of the life and the personality of Christ is the Cross. Now Christ in his relationship to the Cross is called by Montfort Christ Wisdom. Therefore this aspect, Christ Wisdom, constitutes the principal and specific aspect of the Christological vision of Father de Montfort.” The mystery of the Cross occupies the center of the mystery of Christ, since even the Incarnation and the other mysteries “are ordered toward the Cross.”²²

On Christ Wisdom the attitude of the Christian is expressed in certain formulas dear to Montfort: to be united or give oneself to Christ-Cross (CG 1, LEW 225), to obtain and preserve Wisdom (LEW 220, MR 15), to reproduce in oneself the life of Christ (MP 5; TD 44, 50; LEW 214; SM 67), the realization of the reign of God (TD 1, 13, 22, 49, 113, 133, 258; H 3:1, 4), the slavery of love (TD 118, 120). But the attitude of Christians is above all “to be in conformity, united, and consecrated to Jesus Christ” (TD 120). This formula, which includes a relationship to the baptismal promises and to the Cross, is concretely summarized in the Montfortian version of the slavery of love.²³

Montfort speaks of Mary in relationship to the plan of the Trinity for salvation (TD 16-48); in her work for the reign of Christ in the world (TD 1). He insists on Mary’s transcendence as Mother of Christ and, consequently, sees her in intimate relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit (MP 2-5; TD 5-6, 16-17, 22-23). For mankind, Mary is the treasurer of grace, all-powerful queen and spiritual Mother (TD 23-38). “A special devotion

to Mary is, therefore, necessary; and later Montfort will say that following Christ's example this devotion must be lived through the slavery of love." We experience the maternity and sovereignty of Mary by being entirely submissive to her through love and not by fear or force.²⁴

The synthesis of Frehen is founded upon *all* the works of Montfort. The accent put on the mystery of the Cross seems, however, to diminish the fundamental importance of the Incarnation. Furthermore, different elements of Montfortian spirituality appear to be seen in opposition to each other rather than seen in their organic unity.

5. Way to Wisdom (L. Perouas, 1973)

The methodology adopted by Perouas in his presentation of Montfortian doctrine resides in his refusal to separate theology and experience.²⁵ It is from the very heart of this experience that insights are discovered "which go beyond and balance out his doctrine on man and God, on Mary and the Church."²⁶

Montfort underscores the corruption of sinful man and asks that he "renounce his very self," i.e., that he empty himself not of his own personality but of that foundation of egoism which resides in man. Perouas reminds us that Montfort's perspective is mystical, which does not stop at the metaphysical essence of man but at his position before the gratuitous gift of God. From such a perspective, Montfort "gives the impression of minimizing and, at times, of forgetting the active collaboration" of the Christian in his own sanctification. Yet, in reality, he insists on a total gift of self to God "and speaks less of letting himself be taken over by God than of making his Consecration according to a precise method." Such an attitude is explained by the moralizing influence at the end of the seventeenth century, which understated at times the importance of the mystical dimension. Montfort's experience contained the two tendencies: the vision of the man who despises self and wishes to live apart from the world and that of man who wants to realize his own desires (cf. L 5). As entirely submissive as he was to his superiors and, above all, to Jesus through Mary, Montfort "sensed, from his own experience, that man was made for affection, for freedom, for action, for creativity. It is in the tension of existing between these two realities that we best discover the feeling which Montfort had for man."²⁷

Faithful to Augustinian thought, Montfort experienced *God Alone*, his preferred motto, which expresses the great, incomprehensible, inaccessible (TD 157), and far-off God. This God, considered, so Perouas believes, "almost as the Sun King, must be served totally, without division, without alloy," and it is very important to calm him in his anger (LEW 45; SM 66; TD 85) and not to approach him directly (TD 18). Montfort, however, stresses God as a "good father. . . . From his youth, Louis Marie perceived the All-Powerful as Providence, sovereign Monarch, angry Father, and yet a God close to him."²⁸

The closeness of God is perceived in the Incarnation, which "is truly at the center of Montfort's doctrine." It is a mystery of self-emptying and of dependence on Mary, which mystifies us (TD 18, 139). Montfort lingers on the birth of Jesus, to which he dedicates eleven hymns; a little on Jesus' apostolic life (LEW 114); and quite a bit on the Passion, which is the object of eleven hymns and two chapters in LEW. "This choice shows us," says Perouas, "that Montfort comprehended with difficulty the depth of humanity that the Incarnation signified. And yet Jesus Christ was, for him, very much a living being."²⁹ In fact, he speaks of Jesus Christ living in us (TD 61) and of the active permanence of the events of his life (MR).

It is certain that Montfort encountered God in the Sacraments and in the Bible, but also in the poor (H 18:8). This is revealed in the episode at Dinan, where he cried out, “*Open up to Jesus Christ.*” When he was approaching thirty, he discovered Jesus Christ as Wisdom, personified as a feminine figure. Thus his love for God becomes spousal: a decisive moment in his journey toward maturity. At the end of his life, Montfort brings to the fore the role of the Holy Spirit. Through Mary, he finds the Spirit in abundance (TD 36, 217). It is above all to her that he directs his prayer to obtain the apostles of the end times (PM 15-16), which is the period of a “purified, renewed Church, led entirely by the Spirit.”³⁰

The interpretation formulated by Perouas of the figure of Mary in Montfort is extremely critical and seems, at times, to lack objectivity and coherence. Led by the mentality of his times, Montfort would have unconsciously diminished the figure of Mary, for he never mentions her intelligence, her will, her body. “Nor does he ever show us Mary in action; her holiness appears that much more beautiful inasmuch as she let herself be molded by God without contributing anything; her Divine Maternity is that much more admirable in that she only consented to it.”³¹ And yet, at the same time, Montfort would be guilty of one of those excesses of maximalism in associating Mary to Christ, presenting her as “analogous to him” (cf. TD 74) and giving to her by grace the same rights and privileges that belong to God by nature.

Dipping into the spiritual currents of his time, especially into Augustinianism, Montfort liked to consider the Church as the Mystical Body, of which Christ is the Head and the faithful are the members (TD 32; FC 27). The concept of Church, as he saw it, tends to limit itself to the “predestinate,” those who live in the state of grace.

If Father de Montfort saw in the Church a reality that was at first invisible, mystical, that does not mean that he rejected its external, social aspect. The best indication of this was his “total fidelity to the hierarchy.”³² In fact, Montfort always generously manifested during his lifetime a perfect obedience to the Pope and to the bishops in whose dioceses he worked.

Montfort criticized and castigated the different categories present in the Church of his time: Religious, theologians, pious people, priests, etc. He spoke of the Church “*so weakened and so soiled by the crimes of her children*” (PM 20). He denounced its terrible burden, because he wished a pure Church, one with a different appearance: poor, abandoned to Providence, apostolic, and full of initiative as it was in the first ages of Christianity and as it will be in the end times. In apocalyptic language which is even a little millenarian, says Perouas, “Father de Montfort depicts the far-off future of the Church. It will truly be the reign of the Holy Spirit. The Church will have found a marvelous power to convert the Turks and the Jews; within its own walls there will appear Christians greater than those who have appeared up to that time, because they will be formed by Mary.”³³

It is quite evident that Perouas did not wish to offer an organic synthesis, particularly of the spirituality of Montfort. What he develops lacks an explicit systematic formulation.

6. God Alone: Meeting God with Montfort (1981)

In this research document produced by authors from around the globe, all aspects of Montfortian spirituality converge within a presentation of Montfort as “a man of God,” as the one who “had an experience of God that was quite personal and who witnessed to this in an original manner.”³⁴ The mystical dimension is a particular need perceived by contemporary society. It is present in Montfort, in a totally absorbing way. It explains every other dimension.

In the first part, dealing with man's salvation today, Father Bilo describes the situation of man in the twentieth century, as slowly coming to the conclusion that "the building of a just and human world cannot happen without God." Montfort responds to this "need for God who is near and who calls man to collaborate with him." He teaches man how to live in communion with Christ Wisdom "in a living and personal relationship." For the people of today who are conscious of their responsibilities and social commitments, Montfort presents to us a God of love, who invites us to live in true solidarity with the poor.³⁵

Montfort was a man who truly encountered God. He combined an intense apostolic activity with an exceptional experience of God (Bossard, Fabry). Louis Marie's entire life is guided by the fundamental option for *God Alone*, the triune God.

Montfort lived his relationship with God, Father and Providence (L 2, L 33; LCM 4-5; TD 169, 215; H 28). He encountered Him in prayer, in his missions, in the trials of life, in Mary, in the poor (Parrado, Jo van Osch).

Even more, Montfort encountered God in Jesus Christ, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. That was true for his entire missionary life, even if the beginning and the end of his apostolate seem more profoundly marked by a sapiential note. In attributing to Christ the title Wisdom, Montfort brings out four aspects of this mystery in harmony with biblical Revelation: 1) Christ as "fullness," infinite treasure for mankind (LEW 62); 2) as "Word" that reveals and transforms and whose pronouncements one must believe in order to be saved (LEW 133-153); 3) as "Love" in his dynamic bending low to man; 4) as "Cross," since "*Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom*" (LEW 180).

The relationship of Montfort with the Holy Spirit is both profound and original. The mystical perspective applies well to Montfort's anthropology, whose pessimistic affirmations wish to simply prove "the impossibility of self-salvation." This pervades equally the entire Marian experience of Louis Marie, for whom the Virgin is the "*mysterious milieu*" (TD 265) where we can live in the liberty of the children of God, encounter Christ, and be docile to the Spirit (Bossard).

The third part of the volume, which was written by Father Jan van Osch, describes the correspondence between the journey that permitted Montfort to encounter God and the theological views of today. Van Osch points out that by his motto "*God Alone*," Montfort proclaims that "the unreasonable (for us) Wisdom of His love is found at the origin of every Christian act."³⁶ He comes to the aid of contemporary man to discover the true relationship between morality and mysticism, introducing ethics into the loving response to the gratuitous love of God, Who necessarily has priority. It is thus that the holy missionary lived, being at ease in the mystical field, recognizing in his submission to authority "the concrete expression of his openness to the Holy Spirit." A total receptivity to the love and the Wisdom of God is the fundamental attitude of the Virgin Mary. "For Montfort . . . the Secret of Mary consists in the fact that the continual attention given to the feminine figure of Mary as it appears in the divine plan of salvation renders the Christian more open to God as He is in reality, to God Who became man, Who suffered and was humiliated right up to death on the Cross. He is convinced that the relationship to this 'woman,' the New Eve by the side of the New Adam, is able to accelerate and make more perfect the union of men with God."³⁷

Montfort is an example to be followed "in the sense that the purpose of all his efforts at renewal is always God Alone and His Kingdom." He teaches that "every effort at Church renewal and all human attempts at betterment can only bear fruit if they are carried on and conducted by the Spirit of God."³⁸

This work, *God Alone: Meeting God with Montfort*, offers important insights as well as an original interpretation of the givens of Montfortian spirituality. But there is such a variety of authors within its three parts that the work cannot be called an organized whole.

7. God Alone Is My Tenderness (R. Laurentin, 1984)

As his contribution to the movement to proclaim Montfort a Doctor of the Church, Laurentin examines Saint Louis Marie from a theological perspective.³⁹ He states that Montfort's theology is "a theology of the history of salvation. . . . It is a Trinitarian theology." He distinguishes in it three points that include the presence of Mary: the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Holy Spirit.

"This [the Incarnation] is the very center of his [Montfort's] living theology: the descent of God to the lowliness of our humility and a taking of us into the divine plenitude."⁴⁰ In the "foolishness of a transcendent God," we find the basic intuition of Montfort, which gives a profound unity to his thought: "*It is through the Blessed Virgin Mary that God came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world*" (TD 1). Along with the Greek Fathers, Laurentin interprets this principle in the sense that "it is through Mary that God became man so that man could be divinized." The mission of Mary consists, in fact, in being the *forma Dei*, the mold of God. By this image Montfort "expresses . . . the admirable exchange by which the Son of God is formed as a man in Mary in order that we may be formed in the image of God . . . , i.e., divinized." Mary is the embodiment and the sign of our paradoxical God: "*God is at the same time infinitely holy and raised up, infinitely condescending and proportioned to man's weakness*" (SM 20). Seeing this total gift of love on the part of God, we also should give our all (H 57:2). It is in this context that the Holy Slavery of Montfort is situated.⁴¹

The juncture of the Incarnation and the Cross, which is central in the life and preaching of Montfort, is the Trinity: "In the bosom of the Father, Jesus is desirous of the Cross and becomes incarnate in order to lovingly embrace it." Montfort does not insist on the link between the Cross and Mary but, rather, on their difference: "*The Cross is adorable. / Mary is not*" (H 102:23; cf. LEW 172). We are surprised that he does not allude to Mary near the Cross nor to the Co-redemption. "It is above all because he puts the filial link of the Incarnation within the maternal womb of Mary. . . . For him, everything is found at the point of departure."⁴²

"The theology of the Holy Spirit according to Grignon de Montfort is, like that of the Incarnation and the Cross, the expression of a hope It is a theology of the history of salvation. And the departure point is, here again, Trinitarian."⁴³ The Holy Spirit occupies a place of principal importance in the writings of Montfort. In Mary and with her He is the one Who accomplishes the work of the Incarnation of the Word; in her and with her it is again He Himself Who forms Christ in Christians, especially during the end times (PM 15-16). The title "*Spouse of the Holy Spirit*," attributed to Mary by Montfort, even though it expresses authentic values, remains, however, "inadequate and ambiguous"; according to Laurentin; it would be preferable to substitute other expressions.

The synthesis of Laurentin is especially valuable because of his insistence on the theocentrism and the work of the Holy Spirit in Montfortian spirituality. But he, too, does not insist enough on the sapiential and apostolic dimensions of Montfort's spirituality.

III. Systematic Synthesis

The principal elements of Montfortian spirituality have already been well described in the different articles of this Handbook. We will attempt to weave these together into a general, organic presentation.

To remain faithful to its roots, the interpretation of Montfortian spirituality must take into account the bipartite division present in the works of Montfort: the descending movement of God towards man and the ascending movement of man towards God. This rhythmic call-response, so evident in the works of Montfort (especially in LEW and TD), must therefore be preserved if we wish to remain faithful to Montfort's biblically based structure.

The statement that sums up Montfortian spirituality is the following: "Responding to the love of the Father, expressed in salvation history by the mission of the Word and the Holy Spirit, and living for God Alone, Father and Providence, by means of the total Consecration of oneself to Christ Wisdom, in the docility of the Spirit, in communion with Mary, within the ecclesial community that announces the reign of God." Or even this other formula, which covers the essential: "To God Alone, by Christ Wisdom, in the Spirit, in communion with Mary, for the reign."

The meeting point of these two movements is the totality of the gift, which belongs above all to God, Who gives Himself to the world by an infinite and paradoxical love, especially in the Incarnation and in the paschal mystery of Jesus. The total donation of oneself also characterizes man, who pledges himself to return to God by preparing the reign of Christ in the world in the absolute docility of the Spirit and by identification with Mary, type of the faithful Church.

1. *Descending Movement:*

"All things come from the Father through Christ Wisdom, in the power of the Spirit, in collaboration with Mary, in the ecclesial community." This fundamental assertion contains several basic elements of Montfort that must be underscored.

a. Everything begins with the Father. The action of God in history, revealed in Holy Scripture, is an essential part of Montfortian spirituality. Montfort sums up his concept of God in the motto "*God Alone*," repeated 150 times. The expression indicates, first of all, that God is the absolute value. Creatures, including Our Lady herself, are not excluded unless they cause us to be separated from God. Their value is that much more insofar as they refer and lead us to God. And Montfort is able to affirm: "*I desire God Alone and the soul*" (H 91:12). Or further, on the subject of Mary: "*That person will find only God and no creature in the most lovable Virgin Mary. . . . It is God Alone who lives in her*" (SM 20, 21). Thus "God Alone" equals "God is all," which must suffice: "*God Alone, and that suffices*" (H 28:23); "*God Alone is my tenderness, / God Alone is my support, / God Alone is all my well-being, / my life and my riches*" (H 52:11).

The motto, God Alone, also expresses that God is Father/Providence, on Whom depends all of salvation history and one's personal life. "*God the Father, from whom every perfect gift comes as from an essential source*" (SM 9). In LEW, Montfort contemplates Wisdom in eternity: "*From his beginnings, we contemplate him in eternity, living in the bosom of the Father, as the object of his kindnesses*" (LEW 14). And it is in the inner life of the Trinity that Montfort places the decision of Eternal Wisdom to come into the world: "*The decision is made and completed: Eternal Wisdom, or the Son of God, will become man*" (LEW 46). It is from the Trinity and – from its very interior – from the Father, named by

Montfort before the Son and the Holy Spirit (TD 4-5, 16, 17, 23, 29), that is born the plan of salvation, in which Mary also is involved (TD 22).

(b. Through Christ-Wisdom.) In perfect harmony with biblical tradition, Montfort proclaims his profession of Christological faith: “*Jesus, true God and true man, only Son of the Father and of Mary always virgin!*” (LEW 223). He prefers, however, to consider Christ as Savior and Life: “*Jesus Christ Our Savior is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of all things, . . . our only way who must lead us, our only truth whom we must believe, our only life who must give us life and our sole all in all things, who must be sufficient for us*” (TD 61).

The title Montfort likes to attribute to Christ is Wisdom. According to LEW, this title brings out four aspects of the mystery of Christ: the “fullness” (LEW 9), the “Word” (LEW 95), the “Love” that comes down to man in a humbling kenosis (LEW 70-71), and the “Cross” (LEW 180).

Interpreting these four aspects in terms adapted to our contemporary situation, we can recognize four attributes of Christ Wisdom. First, Christ is the unique Mediator of Salvation: we proclaim Christ as the “unique Mediator between God and mankind” (1 Tim 2:5; cf. 1 Cor 8:6). This given of our faith excludes every possibility of self-salvation and implies a vital relationship with the living person of Christ, the very center of the Good News and of the Christian life. Second, Jesus, the Word of God, is the Master of life. He transmits to every person the Wisdom coming from God, and indicates to us how we should act in order to enter into life. The radical demands of the Gospel are imperatives. Third, Montfort contemplates Christ Wisdom in his kenosis of love, the Incarnation, so foreign to human standards (LEW 167). In such a dynamic of condescending love, we find certain Christological mysteries especially dear to Montfort: the Incarnation, the key mystery, which contains all the other mysteries (TD 248); the infancy of Jesus (H 57-66); the Eucharist (LEW 71); the Sacred Heart (H 40-44; H 47-48). The presence of Christ in the poor and those who suffer according to Mt 25:31-46 is also evident in the life of Montfort (recall the episode at Dinan: “*Open up to Jesus Christ*”). Finally, at least as much as the Incarnation, Montfort underlines the importance of the Cross, which he identifies with Wisdom: “*Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom*” (LEW 180). Like St. Paul (1 Cor 2:2), he announces Jesus crucified. Like him, he does not exclude the Resurrection but understands the part for the whole. It is necessary that today we explain the paschal mystery in its totality, seeing the Cross as inseparable from the Resurrection: it is the Cross of the Risen One. Salvation comes to us through the paschal mystery celebrated in the Sacraments of the Church.

(c. In the power of the Spirit.) Montfortian spirituality also underlines that to the Person of the Holy Spirit belongs the realization of salvation history as a regenerative, unifying, and missionary force. With Montfort it is correct to underscore the work of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of the Word—when, with Mary and in Mary, “*he produced his masterpiece, which is God made man*” (TD 20)—as well as His role in the birth and the growth of Christ within all mankind (TD 20-35; SM 13-67). The times of the Church coincide with the “*special reign*” of the Spirit, which seemingly implies an acceleration of His Pentecostal presence in the final phase of the “*end times*” (PM 15).

(d. In collaboration with Mary.) The economy of salvation is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word become Incarnate in Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit. The plan of the Trinity (TD 14-37) and the journey of Wisdom toward man (LEW 105-106) go through a woman: Mary. With Montfort, we must underline certain aspects of the figure of this woman.

“*Excellent masterpiece of the Most High*” (TD 5), Mary is, of her being, “*entirely relative to God*” (TD 225). The fundamental collaboration of Mary with the Father consists in her maternal action towards Jesus and Christians, an action that we should consider, with Montfort, as a participation in the fruitfulness of the Father (TD 17).

Wisdom finds in Mary the person worthy of welcoming Him (LEW 105). And the proposal of God encounters in her the most adequate response (LEW 106). Mary is not only the Seat of Wisdom; she is the person who welcomes Him in faith and puts herself totally at His service (LEW 107). The one who imitates Mary becomes the Church welcoming the Word of God in his life.

The relationship of Mary with the Spirit is found on the level of a communion of love and of collaboration. Montfort expresses that reality by calling Mary fruitful and faithful “*spouse*” of the Holy Spirit (TD 20-21, 35-36, 269). The formation of the saints becomes, therefore, the united effort of the Spirit and of Mary, each one of course on a different level. The Spirit makes of Mary His new creation (cf. TD 261) and the type of the Church in the fields of holiness, of virginity, and of maternity (cf. TD 261). She is for Christians the model of availability and of docility to the Spirit.

(e. In the ecclesial community.) The saving work of the Trinity is realized in the Church, which is “the sign and the instrument of the intimate union with God and of the unity of all of humankind” (LG 1). With Montfort, we must point out the visible aspect of the Church – endowed with the Sacraments and its ministers, guided by the Pope and bishops – and the invisible aspect, the Mystical Body. Within the Church, Montfort assesses the priceless value of Baptism, which has made of its members a consecrated people with the mission of extending the reign of God up to its definitive realization.

2. Ascending movement

There is no other path for man than that revealed by God in salvation history. Consequently, we can say that “man responds to the love of the Trinity by living for the glory of God Alone the Consecration to Christ Wisdom, in the docility of the Spirit, in the welcome of Mary, and in ecclesial communion, with a view to the announcing of the reign of God.”

(a. The glory of God alone.) If God is the supreme value, the principle from which existence and salvation come, man must adore Him in spirit and in truth, live in his presence, conduct himself as His child, and work for His glory. Everything must be oriented toward the glory of God, which means toward the praise of God for His action in salvation history, especially for the redemptive work of Christ. Montfort also inspires us to purify our intentions: we must not look for our own proper interests but, rather, the accomplishment of the will of the Father through pure love: “*Having only God Alone in view, without any other interest than that of his glory*” (RM 62); “*They do all their actions for the greater glory of God*” (RW 203); “*Reign in me with your power, / in order that I may glorify him / God alone eternally*” (H 141:15).

(b. Consecration to Christ-Wisdom.) Christ is mankind’s infinite treasure (LEW 64-67); man arrives at saving encounter with him by the gift of his heart (LEW 132). This is accomplished by the perfect Consecration to Christ, which brings with it the renunciation of Satan and the total gift of oneself to Christ by the renewal of the baptismal promises (TD 120-130).

(c. In the docility of the Spirit.) The Spirit recalls to our minds the Gospel (Jn 14:26), makes us cry out “*Abba*” (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), and dispenses life to us (Jn 6:63) and the charisms necessary for the edification of the Church (1 Cor 12:4-11; 14:12). Like Montfort,

we follow the Spirit especially in our daily actions, trying to identify ourselves with Mary, whose spirit is “*the Spirit of God*” (TD 258); we also follow the Spirit in the apostolate, allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit without putting affective or economic obstacles in the way (PM 7-9).

(d. In the welcome of Mary.) Montfort speaks of a unique Consecration to Christ through Mary. There are those who prefer, today, to reserve the Consecration to Christ and to find other words to recognize the maternal and exemplary function of Mary in Christian life. Montfort has recourse to a multitude of expressions to proclaim such a recognition, and he often uses the answer of the beloved disciple, who welcomes Our Lady into his own (Jn 19:27; cf. TD 144, 179, 216, 266; SM 66). Thus, in giving himself up in a filial relationship to Mary, the Christian, like the Apostle John, “accepts among his personal goods” the mother of Christ and introduces her into the entire area of his interior life, which means, into his human and Christian “I” (RMat 45). In the journey of man toward Wisdom, Mary represents the “perfect way,” which assures an intimate and faithful union with Christ (LEW 220-221; TD 157-158).

(e. In ecclesial communion.) The baptized person is part of the ecclesial community, in which he shares in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ. As such, he must follow the liturgical route: celebrate with his brothers and sisters the divine mysteries, frequent the Sacraments, meditate on Sacred Scripture, and give witness to the Lord by his life and his speech. Every Christian must live this ecclesial spirituality, which is intrinsic, therefore, to Montfortian spirituality. All are invited to take “Mary as a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries” (MC 16). The disciple of Christ will avoid every individualistic attitude, focusing his entire attention on being with others and for others, in conformity with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. He will strive to enter into the pastoral life of the community according to the directives of the Pope and the bishops.

“What the soul is to the body,” affirms the *Letter to Diogenes*, “Christians are to humanity.” The Christian must not separate himself from the world but remain in the world to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-14). He is sent into the world to announce and realize salvation (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20). The reign of God fills a central role in the NT and also in the life of Montfort. This must be the purpose of every prayer of the Christian, but it also entails a commitment of life and witness. Jesus will reign, when, through Mary, he becomes better known, loved, and served and when his commandments are better observed (TD 13, 49, 62).

IV. The Path of Montfortian Spirituality

More important than systematic synthesis of the essential points of Montfortian spirituality, is to outline how one can live this spirituality in one’s daily life. Montfort is not ignorant of the fact that the spirituality which he has proposed cannot be improvised. He saw that it cannot be realized automatically: “*This secret becomes great only in the measure in which the soul uses it. Be very careful not to keep your arms crossed, doing no work*” (SM 1). A preparation is necessary, an initiation and a constant exercise are indispensable in order to penetrate this secret more and more deeply and to move through the different stages that make it up. In short, a true initiation into the mysteries of the spiritual life is demanded.

1. Preparation

In order that the act of “*consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, by the hands of Mary*” (LEW 223-227) may not be reduced to a simple formula without

influencing one's life, it must be prepared for by serious reflection and prolonged prayer. This is the reason that Montfort prescribes a month of preparation for a formal commitment to the Consecration: at least twelve days to empty oneself of the "*spirit of the world which is contrary to that of Jesus Christ*" (TD 227), a first week "*to ask for knowledge of themselves and contrition for their sins*" (TD 228), the second week to "*know the Blessed Virgin Mary*" (TD 229), and the third to "*know Jesus Christ*" (TD 230). Even though the act of Consecration is a personal act, Montfort does not separate it from the liturgy: he prescribes that it be done after sacramental confession and Holy Communion (TD 231).

The directives given by Montfort are quite valuable because they urge us to free ourselves, by a spiritual exodus, from the vain wisdom of this world and to know man, Mary, and Christ more profoundly. What must be avoided, however, is a nonchalant repetition of this Montfortian Consecration formula. The contents of the preparatory month should be updated according to CCC, which, following Vatican Council II, offers the fundamental truths relating to the world (67-68: the Creator), to man (82-92: Man, the Fall; 365-423: Man's Vocation), to Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church (107-111; 207-209), and to Jesus in his mysteries (96-150).

The preparatory month must also be harmonized with the liturgy. The more appropriate period seems to be Lent, when the catechumen repeats the cry of the man born blind, which Montfort places on the lips of those preparing for the Consecration: "*Lord, that I may see!*" (cf. TD 228). During Lent the Church invites the faithful to recall their Baptism (SC 109) and prepares them for the solemn Easter Vigil service, the heart of the liturgical year, during which we renew our baptismal promises; it is then that we welcome Mary as a gift of the crucified Lord (cf. Jn 19:15-27).

2. Initiation

Montfort takes into consideration both the purpose to be attained and the route to take: "*As this devotion essentially consists in a state of soul, it will not be understood in the same way by everyone. Some – the great majority – will stop short at the threshold and go no further. Others – not many – will take but one step into its interior*" (TD 119).

The aim is the assimilation of Christocentric-Marian spirituality. Moved by the Holy Spirit (TD 258), identified with Mary, the model of perfection (TD 260), "*proximate end . . . , mysterious milieu . . . easy means*" (TD 265), forms us in Jesus Christ (TD 264), enabling us to live more intimately by him, with him, in him, and for him (TD 257). Montfort does not intend here something transitory nor simply exterior. He speaks of someone with an interior and stable attitude: "*Finally, who will remain in it [in the interior] permanently?*" (TD 119). In practice, it is a matter of acquiring availability and docility to the action of the Spirit and to the maternal collaboration of Mary, in order to be formed in Jesus Christ, which is to say, in order to arrive at spiritual maturity.

The way that leads to this end is the application of the fourfold formula "*do all one's actions by Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, in order to do them more perfectly by Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ*" (TD 257). Such an exercise may seem at first glance to complicate the spiritual life; rather it facilitates it. We have here a method that is required in order that the option for Christ through Mary may bring about a deeper and more apostolic life. Obviously it is in no way necessary to simultaneously practice the four formulas: it suffices to experience them one at a time.

The repetition suggested by Montfort of a formula that actualizes the paschal rhythm of death and Resurrection, of leaving behind our egoism and bringing forth new life in the

Spirit is quite efficacious: “*I renounce myself and give myself to you, my dear Mother*” (TD 259). Better still, because it is more explicitly Christocentric, the following formula that Montfort counsels us to recite often is perhaps more important: “*Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt: I am all yours and all that I have is yours, O my Jesus, through Mary, your most holy Mother*” (TD 233).

S. De Fiores

3. The Montfortian Spirituality Path of Perfection

Saint Louis de Montfort’s path of perfection is characterized by the same qualities of his consecration to the Eternal Wisdom through Mary: Christocentric/Trinitarian, total (therefore involving the Cross), baptismal, Marian and apostolic, as explained in the article *Consecration*.

There are however, varying degrees in the living of this consecration. Saint Louis de Montfort does not exclude beginners from this perfect renewal of the baptismal promises; it evidently can only enhance the path of those in the illuminative (advanced) and unitive (perfect) ways. In fact, this consecration spirituality will of its very nature unfold into an extraordinary depth of union with God Alone through Wisdom Incarnate in the power of the Spirit. It is claimed that the majority of those Christians who seriously set out on the way of perfection remain in the illuminative way. Although Montfort appears to imply this opinion (cf. TD 118), he urges his “*poor, simple folk*” (cf. TD 26) on to the highest stages of union with God.

Nowhere does this saint of the common people formally detail stages of growth into Trinitarian life. He does speak about varying intensities of living his consecration spirituality: “*As this devotion essentially consists in a state of soul, it will not be understood in the same way by everyone. Some – the great majority – will stop short at the threshold and go no further. Others – not many – will take but one step into its interior. Who will take a second step? Who will take a third? Finally who will remain in it permanently? Only the one to whom the spirit of Jesus reveals this secret. The Holy Spirit himself will lead this faithful soul from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from light to light, until at length he attains transformation into Jesus in the fullness of his age on earth and of his glory in heaven*” (TD 118).

What are these steps? The closest we can come to the mind of Montfort appears to be found in the effects of total consecration as outlined especially in TD 213-225, supplemented by his thoughts taken from his other works. The editors of Saint Louis Marie’s *Complete Works* recognize that “*These effects [the ‘wonders of grace’ foretold in TD 35] are presented according to a certain progressive order of the spiritual life*” (GA p. 391, note 361). It is evident that Montfort is describing the stages of growth of someone who is already living the consecration and, it can be presupposed, is already in the illuminative way. However, using the seven “*wonderful effects of this devotion*” as the bare-bones outline, his path can well be applied to even the beginners who undertake the road of Montfort’s consecration spirituality. The various degrees do show an ascending progression to union with the Lord. They are to be understood as essentially intertwined; none exists independently of the others. Although already noted in the article *Consecration* as the effects of perfect devotion to Our Lady, they are considered here as the steps on the path of perfection.

a. Knowledge of Self. “*By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his faithful spouse, you will perceive the evil inclinations of your fallen nature and how incapable you are of any good apart from that which God produces in you ...*”

In a certain sense, this step is the most important since it marks the beginning, the start of the journey itself. The heart of this first of the stages is that we deepen our knowledge of self in the light of a new depth of knowledge of God. In the brilliant light of God's holiness, we perceive our nothingness. To be penetrated with our own nothingness outside of the framework of God's redemptive sharing of his holiness can only lead to discouragement if not despair. Montfort, finely tuned to the workings of the soul, never calls for an inward gaze into our sinful nothingness without stressing the infinite, forgiving Love Who is God.

His demand that a person serious about the spiritual life regularly seek the counsel of a wise spiritual director who knows the path well (cf. LEW 202; H 139:68) also forms part of the context of this first stage.

The saint also calls for—even at this initial step—a recognition of all the other pilgrims on the way to the Lord. In baroque language, he declares: “*The humble Virgin Mary will share her humility with you so that, although you regard yourself with distaste ... you will not look down slightly upon anyone*” (TD 213). The foundational concept implied so often in Montfort that all persons are intertwined, interrelated, is to be seen also here at the first step.

This initial stage presupposes that “*desire*” for holiness so insisted on by Montfort as his first means of acquiring Divine Wisdom (cf. LEW 181-183). It is a desire – the determination to take all the means to arrive at the goal, no matter the cost – and not just a wish (velleity) that characterizes the person willing to examine the depth of one's own sinfulness. And as he tells us in LEW, this desire will express itself in mortification – the willingness to be stripped of all false idols – and in continuous prayer (LEW 184-193) marked by sincere petition springing from simple faith for the great gift of Divine Wisdom. Montfort's magnificent canticles on the desire for Wisdom powerfully express the basic content of this first step (cf. H 103, 124, 126).

b. Joyful Enthusiasm. The second stage on our way to “God Alone” is marked primarily by joyful enthusiasm. With the zeal of a Montfort who as a youth tried to enlist all his fellow students into the Confraternity of the Holy Slavery, the traveler is convinced that nothing stands in the way of union with God, nothing too difficult, no demands too great. The reason for this burst of energy is the experience that Our Lady shares her gift of faith with us. The Annunciation ‘Yes’ which personifies her, is in varying degrees, the life of the voyager into God. “*It is a lively faith ... it is a firm faith ... it is a courageous faith ... it inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love*” (TD 214). The faith is sincere, the experience of Mary's support is real. Yet understood in the light of the entire voyage, it appears to be a youthful enthusiasm which has yet to be sorely tested.

c. Overcoming Roadblocks. This step presumes a letdown after the initial burst of enthusiasm. Roadblocks spring up along the way, especially scruples, fears, overconcern (TD 215; cf. TD 168-169, 263). Saint Louis de Montfort insists throughout his writings that there can be no true advance into God Alone unless the traveler is imbued with pure love understood not in any quietistic sense but as an active and responsible surrender to the Lord like Mary's *fiat*. This presupposes for Montfort, a conviction that God is love so that “*you will look upon him as a loving Father ... you will speak to him as a child does to its Father. If you should have the misfortune to offend him, you will humble yourself before him and 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).

Overanxiety, overconcern about the future, about sinfulness, about our responsibilities all have to be stripped away or else the path appears to be so rugged and the terrain so threatening that there is a serious danger of turning back. The answer to this almost insurmountable problem is, so Montfort simply states, to release ourselves into the tenderness of God. And this too is a gift of Mary, the Mother of Fair Love. Montfort gives strength to the sinner surprised by a sudden fall, or to the soul who for the first time experiences the malice of one's sinfulness. The cure lies in destroying the travesty we make of God when, filled with servile fear or painful overanxiety, we forget the fundamental truth of our faith: God is Love.

d. Unbounded confidence. Peaceful, active and responsible trust is the characteristic of this fourth stage of our journey. With the roadblocks removed, we continue on the way with a new depth of calm, total trust in God's Providence and the maternal care of Our Lady. There is a steadiness now in the travel since the person lives the truth that there is a "*Father in heaven who cannot fail me*" (L 2), and Mary is the "*Mother of saving grace,*" upon whose breast "*all good things come to me*" (TD 216).

It is as if the traveler no longer looks down on all the ruts and sharp rocks in the road but now looks up to the loving God who carries him on eagle's wings. Crosses are experienced, to be sure; yet more than ever, they are borne with extraordinary calm and trust for they are known to be "*dipped in honey*" by Our Lady (cf. TD 154).

e. Lost in Mary's Spirit. The turning point of the entire journey is found here in the fifth step: the travelers "*hide themselves completely in the depths of Mary's soul, becoming living copies of her*" (TD 217). "*You must offer yourself to Mary, happily lose yourself in her, only to find God in her*" (SM 70; cf. TD 222, 264). This is really the specific crux of Montfort's spiritual path of perfection, an essential element which is one of the chief distinguishing marks of his spirituality. This is achieved only through the great gift of the Holy Spirit who alone gives entry into this "*paradise of God.*" It is both the result and cause of being faithful to the interior practices Saint Louis Marie explains: to do all our actions, with Mary, in Mary, by Mary, for Mary, so that they may be done more perfectly through, with, in and for Jesus-Wisdom (cf. SM 45-49, TD 257-265).

Lived in its intensity, this stage of the path brings with it the mystical experience of Our Lady's presence: "*I carry her in the very center of myself, / engraved with lines of glory, / Although in the obscurity of faith*" (H 77:15). "*Should you not savor immediately the sweet presence of the Blessed Virgin within you, take great care not to torment yourself. For this is a grace not given to everyone, and even when God in his great mercy favors a soul with this grace, it remains none the less very easy to lose it, except when the soul has become permanently aware of it through the habit of recollection*" (SM 52).

The mystical marriage of the soul with God takes place in Mary. In a true, mystical sense, we are Mary in whom Jesus lives and reigns. Since it is in Mary that Eternal Wisdom became incarnate and offered himself as victim and priest for the human race, so too it is in the soul transformed into Mary that Wisdom becomes again, in a mystical way, enfleshed.

f. To Live Jesus. Lost in Mary, the soul is formed into Jesus Christ. Mary is the mold of God who formed Christ-Wisdom; she is the mold in whom we must be poured in order to become living copies of Christ-Wisdom.

This step on the Montfortian path of perfection is a further clarification of step five. Saint Louis de Montfort is so insistent that all authentic devotion to Mary must be Christocentric (cf. TD 61-67), that he is careful to clarify that "*losing oneself in Mary*" is to say that we become more and more Jesus. Again, keeping the entire spectrum of Saint Louis de Montfort's teaching in mind, it cannot be stressed enough that this transformation into

Christ is nothing more or less than transformation into the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. Jesus as Wisdom is another of the essential and characteristic traits of Saint Louis Marie's path of perfection. It is specifically under the aspect of Wisdom that Jesus is both present reality and future goal. As the soul unfolds more deeply into Wisdom, so too the entire universe, living the age of Mary, is unfolding more and more through an intrinsic ordination, into the fruit of her womb, the Alpha and Omega Who is Jesus. "*The Holy Spirit himself will lead this faithful soul from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from light to light, until at length he attains transformation into Jesus in the fullness of his age on earth and of his glory in heaven*" (TD 119).

To "*lose oneself in Mary*" is not to speak of quietistic passivity. On the contrary, it is marked by an active zeal for God and for neighbor as is evident from all the writings of the saint and from the clear example of his life.

g. For God Alone. The goal of the journey, the '*terminus ad quem*' of the Montfortian path of perfection: to live in God Alone. Montfort's stress in TD is to show how losing ourselves in Mary is another way of expressing that we live in God for she is the "*echo of 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*" (TD 255). This Marian path of perfection transforms us also so that we too live a life only in reference to God.

Everything according to Montfort, flows from this God of tenderness and everything finds its fulfillment in God. Having been transformed into Jesus, through the power of the Spirit we walk into the blazing light of the Father. This Trinitarian experience is intrinsic to Montfort's way. God is "*tasted,*" "*experienced,*" "*known*" as Father, source and goal of all. The experience of the tenderness of the Father is a critical criterion of our advance in holiness.

It is not, Montfort says, that we will never fall again once we live in the experience of the Holy of Holies; he says that he has seen the stars of heaven [the saints] fall (cf. TD 88). That is why he constantly speaks of the importance of meditation, and of the rosary – which is for Montfort a Gospel meditation with the background music of the Hail Mary – of formulated prayers, both vocal and private. His insistence on the daily rosary, the reading of the Scriptures, is indicative of his concern that those who are so favored with God's grace never think of themselves in elitist fashion as people who do not need the ordinary means of sanctification.

God Alone, goal of all Montfortian spirituality, is never separated from love of neighbor. The way of Mary is essentially intertwined with the apostolate. Montfort's goal is to form a "*mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women*" (TD 114), whose contemplative life constantly overflows to service of one's neighbor especially in "*the end times*" (TD 55-59).

Conclusion. The path Saint Louis de Montfort outlines is the one he himself lived and which he preached to the simple, country people of northwestern France. It is in many ways a distinct and singular path of Christian spirituality. The power it encloses is coupled with, or better still, flows from its marked stress on the tenderness of God and the maternal care of Mary. It is a path which—adapted to each one's own gifts—leads each person and through humanity, the entire cosmos, "*quickly, perfectly, directly, surely*" (TD 168) to the goal, Jesus the Eternal Wisdom, and through Christ in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

P. Gaffney

V. Contemporary Interest

For centuries Montfortian spirituality has exercised its influence on a worldwide scale and with a never-weakening force. Near the end of the second Christian millennium (1987), it received the height of official recognition with the explicit mention made by John Paul II in RMat 48.

The spreading of the writings of Montfort are the source of the present interest in his spirituality. Based on the experiences of the saint, they transmit with conviction what he lived and preached. It is difficult to deny the fascination that the holy missionary exercises through his writings. Using the cultural means of his times, he has succeeded in transmitting a message that goes beyond frontiers and centuries.

Some of the treasures of Montfortian spirituality that are particularly relevant to our times are the following:

1. *Christocentric perspective*

The Christological question, always so highly relevant, is often answered today in a manner that diminishes the figure of Christ. There are those who consider him to be a great moralist and to have a tendency to see only the human in him. On the contrary, Montfort offers a profound and orthodox vision of Jesus. Above all, he gives witness, in pages rich with feeling (TD 61-67), of his personal experience of Christ. Continually Christ is considered in Montfort's works as the "*final end*" (TD 61, 68, 115, 117, 120, etc.) of the spiritual life. For Montfort, the Son of Mary is not among so many others but "*Our Savior, true God and true man*" (TD 61): he is the spiritual life's ultimate and absolute reason, and its fullest realization.

Most especially in LEW, Jesus is at the very center of Montfort's reflections. In the midst of the conflicts of his day among various forms of humanism, some hostile, and others indifferent to the faith, Saint Louis vigorously proclaimed the truly superior Wisdom through the events of the Incarnation and the Cross and in the direct words of Jesus. Everything must be seen in Him and through Him.

Every element in Montfortian spirituality leads back to this divine-human center, to Christ Wisdom: Baptism, the Cross, the apostolate, love for the poor, Mary. In a very special manner, Montfort sees the spiritual relationship with the Mother of the Lord intrinsically oriented toward filial life in Christ and in the Spirit. He castigates with words of fire (cf. TD 98-99) the "*presumptuous devotees*" who continually outrage Christ by their sins "*under the pretext that they are devotees of Our Lady*" (TD 97).

An especially marvelous insight of Montfort is that he finds his spirituality on Baptism (TD 120-131). This Sacrament of Christian initiation, in fact, contains in seed the entire development of the spiritual itinerary. It is from here that the demands of Christian life flow. Mary is the way to the faithful observance of the baptismal promises. Montfort thus unifies the spiritual life in the gift of the heart to Jesus Christ.

2. *Mary: An understanding of woman according to the divine plan*

Women are looking for new areas of responsibility in society and in the Church. Even though Montfort does not propose direct solutions to modern-day questions such as those raised by the feminist movement, he powerfully exalts the figure of woman in the person of Mary. Recognizing the active and responsible participation of the Virgin Mother in salvation history does not leave woman in a subordinate state. In her function as collaborator in

salvation history, Mary represents a principle of self-comprehension as much for man as for woman. And she also leads us toward the discovery of the paternal and merciful face of the Father (TD 169, 215) as well as of his maternal traits (cf. Is 49:14-15). The divinely willed value of Mary constitutes the Marian dimension of Montfortian spirituality. She can contribute to the humanization of the world by injecting her values of receptivity, of the gift of self, of protection for all life: values especially dear to the feminine world.

3. Projection toward the future

Faced with the evil use of scientific discoveries and the accumulation of nuclear arms, contemporary man wonders about the future of the world. Apocalyptic visions slip into his soul. Montfort is not unmindful of such preoccupations; he responds to them not to satisfy vain curiosity but, rather, to lift the veil that covers the final phase of human history. He foresees a tomorrow of battles between diabolical and salvific forces. The latter are those of the Holy Spirit, Christ, Mary, and their kin, whose number includes the apostles of the end times. These forces prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. They consist in his reign within hearts and the world, and are accomplished without marvels or spectacular events. Marian spirituality itself is entirely oriented toward the reign of Christ, for which it is the best and most perfect preparation.

Montfortian spirituality is thus seen as rooted in the past, immersed in the present, and projected toward the future. It proves to be, therefore, a spirituality entirely prepared to confront and to accompany history. Like Christianity, of which it is only a particular facet, it is not fearful of encountering the challenge of different cultures; it penetrates them in order to purify, promote, and elevate them.

S. De Fiores

¹ **J.M. Quérard**, *La mission providentielle du vénérable Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort dans l'enseignement et la propagation de la parfaite dévotion à la sainte Vierge comme préparation au grand regne de Jésus et de Marie dans le monde (The Providential Mission of Venerable Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort in the Teaching and the Propagation of the Perfect Devotion to the Blessed Virgin as Preparation for the Great Reign of Jesus and Mary in the World)*, Haton-Fougeray-Lanoë/Metayer, Paris/Rennes/Nantes 1884, 192, 159; cf. **M. Audran**, *Les différentes formes de la spiritualité du bienheureux Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (The Different Forms of the Spirituality of Blessed Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort)*, in *Cahiers thomistes* 3 (1928), 521-541.

² **Quérard**, *La mission providentielle*, 51, 55-69.

³ *Ibid.*, 239-242.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 244. The book attributed to Montfort is also cited on page 219.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ **A. Lhoumeau**, *La vie spirituelle à l'école de saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (The Spiritual Life at the School of Saint Louis de Montfort)*, Reyaert, Bruges 1953 (1st ed. 1901), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132, 274.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9, 220, 254.

¹² *Ibid.*, 224-362.

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- ¹³ **H. Huré**, *Préface à L'amour de la Sagesse éternelle (par la "Vraie dévotion à Marie") puissante synthèse de spiritualité par le Bienheureux L. M. de Montfort (Preface to The Love of the Eternal Wisdom [by Means of the "True Devotion to Mary"]): A Powerful Synthesis of Spirituality by Blessed L. M. de Montfort)*, editio typica, Librairie Mariale, Pontchâteau 1929, II-III.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, historical Introduction, [4].
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, [80].
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, [6].
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, [80].
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 275-276.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.
- ²¹ **H. Frehen**, "Corso di spiritualità monfortana," Montfort Scholasticate, Rome 1966-1967, 21-24.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 59, 62.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 52-56, 79-85.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 88-103.
- ²⁵ **L. Perouas**, *Ce que croyait Grignon de Montfort et comment il a vécu sa foi*, Tours, Mame 1973, 139. English edition, *A Way to Wisdom*, Montfortians Yesterday and Today, Bay Shore, 1982.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 115-138.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144, 154-555.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-159.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 180.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 175-189.
- ³⁴ **G. Barbera et al.**, *Dieu Seul: A la recontre de Dieu avec Montfort (God Alone: Meeting God with Montfort)*, Centre international Montfortianain, Rome 1981, 4.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-19.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-28, 29-49.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67-74, 75-81.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-88.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.
- ⁴⁰ **R. Laurentin**, *Dieu seul est ma tendresse (God Alone Is My Tenderness)*, O.E.I.L., Paris 1984, 144.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 146-159.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 159-176.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 176-195.