

# SAINT LOUIS MARIE DE MONTFORT AND THE BÉRULLIAN SCHOOL

Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716),<sup>1</sup> "the last of the great Bérullians"<sup>2</sup> has considerably contributed to the renown and popularity of the French School of spirituality. Pope John Paul II calls his encounter with the saint's writings "a decisive turning point" in his life and terms Montfort's teaching "indispensable to anyone who means to give himself without reserve to Christ and to the work of redemption." Having adopted Saint Louis Marie's path of spirituality, His Holiness discovered "a new attitude springing from the depths of my faith, as though from the very heart of the Trinity and Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> The papal magisterium has, since the time of the fortuitous re-discovery of Montfort's *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary* in 1842,<sup>4</sup> constantly praised the writings of this vagabond troubadour of the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom.

The popularity of the saint has grown remarkably especially within the last few years. Not only have some of his works become best sellers but the recently published 1400 page volume *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort*<sup>5</sup> has been twice reprinted within the first several months of its appearance. The spirituality of this vagabond preacher from the village of Montfort in Brittany, France, has popularized essential elements of Cardinal de Bérulle's doctrine and helped make it accessible to the man and woman in the pew.

Faithful to the main lines of the French School, Montfort imprints his own stamp on it and so intensely and with such originality that he can be considered as a distinct branch of the Bérullian school. It is Saint Louis Marie's similarity and dissimilarity with the French School which this article will examine in summary fashion. Since the core of Montfort's spirituality is his understanding of "consecration," we will consider this synopsis of his teaching in order to point out both his closeness and his distance from the thought of the spirituality of 17th century France. These differences and similarities have their root in the variety of influences upon the saint. We will, therefore, first examine the main sources of Montfort's teaching and

---

<sup>1</sup> The works of the saint in English, except for his Cantiques which will be published in 1996, can be found in *God Alone: The Collected Writings of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore NY, 1987. All of the Cantiques are found in the French edition of Montfort's works, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Seuil, Paris 1966. Biographies of Louis de Montfort include: B. Papàsogli, *Montfort, A Prophet for Our Times*, Edizioni Monfortane, Rome, 1991, and L. Le Crom, s.m.m., *Un apôtre marial, Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716)*, Les traditions françaises, Tourcoing, 1947.

<sup>2</sup> This well-known expression of Brémond is clarified by the excellent article of V.Devy, s.m.m., "Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort: Le dernier des grands Bérulliens" in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 18 (1948) 294-315.

<sup>3</sup> André Frossard and Pope John Paul II, "Be Not Afraid!", Saint Martin's Press, New York, pp. 125-126.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in God Alone*, pp. 289-397. In number 114 of this marian masterpiece, Saint Louis de Montfort foresees that his manuscript "will lie hidden in the darkness and silence of a chest" and so it was during the times of the French Revolution until it was accidentally found at the Motherhouse of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary (Montfort Missionaries) at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre, France, in 1842.

<sup>5</sup> Montfort Publications, Bay Shore NY, 1994.

then his doctrine on "consecration to the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom through the hands of Mary."<sup>6</sup>

## I. The Sources of Saint Louis de Montfort's Teaching

Leaving aside the variety of family influences on the young Louis Marie Grignion,<sup>7</sup> we will consider the strong impact the Jesuits and Sulpicians had upon him, keeping in mind that he interpreted these teachings in the light of his constant readings and his own experience.

### A. The Jesuits

From the inception of his studies at the Jesuit college of St. Thomas à Becket in Rennes (1684), Saint Louis de Montfort counted the spiritual sons of Saint Ignatius Loyola as lifelong friends. For eight years, the young Louis Grignion assimilated not only the classical teachings of the Jesuits but even more so, their spirit. The ultimate purpose of the college of Saint Thomas was not to impart the humanistic education for which the school was renowned, but to develop in the students "the knowledge and love of our Creator and Redeemer."<sup>8</sup> Louis Marie grew, therefore, not only in his grasp of the humanities but primarily in his life in Christ Jesus. Spurred on by the "always greater" of ignatian spirituality, and under the direction of his Jesuit directors, the young man already undertook mortifications, a life of poverty and of service to the outcasts for which he would become so well known. It was probably Father Descartes, (nephew of the famous philosopher) who instilled in Montfort the radical trust in "the good God." As a member of the Jesuit Sodality of Our Lady, Louis Marie made his first steps in his understanding of consecration and in the apostolate. Moreover, under the direction of Father Provost, the head of the Sodality at Rennes, he deepened his love of Our Lady, considering her primarily not so much as Queen but as Mother. The spiritual maternity will become his fundamental view of Mary's relationship to the Church.<sup>9</sup> Father Gilbert, well-known at that time for his heroic patience amid so many crosses, became a model of Christian stoicism which Montfort was eager to imitate in his years as an itinerant preacher of the Good News. A diocesan priest, Father Bellier, led a group of the students of Saint Thomas in ministry among the poverty stricken of the city of Rennes, thereby introducing Louis Marie to an apostolate among the discards of society. Finally, the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola became a rich source of Louis Grignion's advance in holiness. So strongly was he attached to the Exercises that during his priestly ministry, he customarily made retreats with the Jesuits, especially at moments of painful persecution. Here again, Montfort's originality stands out: he will draw up his own

---

<sup>6</sup> The well known formula of consecration written by Saint Louis de Montfort is found only in his christological work, *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*. See *God Alone*, pp. 112-114.

<sup>7</sup> For a study of this interesting facet of a saint's personality, cf. S. De Fiore s.m.m., *Itinerario spirituale di s. Luigi Maria di Montfort (1673-1716) nel periodo fino al sacerdozio (5 Giugno 1700)*, Marian Library Studies, University of Dayton, 1974. De Fiore's work details much of what is found in this first section of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Jesu. Auctoritate Septimae Congregationis Generalis aucta, Romae, in Collegio Romano ejusdem Societatis, 1591, Regulae Provinciales I.*

<sup>9</sup> C. Flachaire, speaking of the Jesuits Binet, de Barry and Poiré, states that the devotion of the Jesuits to Our Lady "is first of all a constant call to affection and tenderness." (*La dévotion à la Vierge dans la littérature catholique au commencement du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Apostolat de la Presse, 1957, p. 34.). Cf. P. Gaffney s.m.m., *The Spiritual Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary According to Saint Louis de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 1976.

Exercises which, although based on the idea and framework of Ignatius, radically differ in scope, method and content.<sup>10</sup>

The seed of Montfort's ministry and teachings were sown by the Jesuits at Rennes. Because of their example and under their direction, he decided to become a priest. They will be his support when all others abandon him. The works of many Jesuits especially J.B. Saint-Jure (who may be called a Bérullian Jesuit), Jean-Joseph Surin, Paul de Barry, François Poiré, Jacques Nouet and in a special way, Jacques Crasset had a strong influence on him.

Louis de Montfort's departure from Rennes - and from friends and family - at the Cesson bridge (1692), demonstrates how intensely his eight years of Jesuit formation have influenced his personality. The young man of 19 years of age refused to ride a horse to Paris; instead, in imitation of Jesus and the apostles, he decided to walk to the Capital as a poor man. As soon as he crossed the bridge separating him from his family, he gave away everything that he possessed - money, clothes, baggage - to the poor. Dressed in the rags of a beggar with whom he had exchanged his new suit, joyfully living for "*God Alone*," trusting totally in the Lord's loving Providence, the young man epitomizes a finished product of Jesuit formation in the 17th century: his keen intellect, his philosophical training, his grasp of the humanities, all is "*ad majorem Dei gloriam*."

## B. Sulpicians

Montfort's eight years at the Jesuit College of Rennes were followed by eight years under the direction of the Sulpicians at Paris (1692-1700). Although his Sulpician formation is stressed by all his biographers, it must be kept in mind that when dealing with Louis Grignon, the followers of Jean Jacques Olier were building upon a firm Jesuit foundation. In fact, it could be said that, to some extent, it was the training he received at St. Thomas à Becket which made his stay at St. Sulpice often difficult and which brought about an eventual rupture with some facets of the Sulpician priestly model. The spirituality of Cardinal de Bérulle which St. Sulpice embodied was definitely assimilated by Montfort the seminarian. Yet the manner of priestly living imparted by the Sulpicians, especially by Fathers Tronson and Leschassier, was too rigid, too prim and proper, too careful, for Montfort.<sup>11</sup> He was always attached to the "openness to the horizon," which he had imbibed as a student of the Jesuits. Montfort the rather singular charismatic found it impossible to become Montfort the rather stodgy, settled cleric.

Saint Louis de Montfort's studies in Paris may be divided into three stages:

**1. His first two years as a seminarian (1692-1694)** were spent at the "Community of poor ecclesiastics" under the direction of the Sulpician, Claude Bottu de la Barmondière, renowned for his allegiance to the Holy See in spite of the rampant Gallicanism of the era.<sup>12</sup> Montfort was overjoyed to be in a community of seminarians where poverty was extolled and vividly practiced. Being poor was considered a great honor for it was an imitation of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. van der Hulst "Discernment" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp.303-304.

<sup>11</sup> De Fiore emphasizes the differences between Olier and Tronson (cf. *Itinerario*, pp. 146-165); Deville, on the other hand, writes: "Perhaps too much has been made of the way J.J. Olier's successors, especially L. Tronson, distorted and hardened the teaching given at Saint-Sulpice in its early stages." (R. Deville, "The French School of Spirituality" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.442.)

<sup>12</sup> Father de la Barmondière's staunch allegiance to the successors of Peter became a characteristic of Louis Grignon: cf. A.Rum, "Popes/Bishops" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 941-952.

poverty of the Lord. This practical poverty coupled with Montfort's encounter with the writings of the Bérullian, Henri Boudon, on the cross of Christ and on holy slavery,<sup>13</sup> had a decisive and permanent influence on Montfort's life and works.

It was because of the encounters with his first Sulpician spiritual director, Father de la Barmondière, that Montfort's difficulties with the contemporary Sulpician style of priestly formation began to surface. His confessor advised him - and rightly so, it appears - to be more prudent in his mortifications and not to absent himself from the community recreations, for such was the Rule of the house. Montfort was torn between his "ardent desires on the one hand and the rules of obedience on the other, rules which arrest and bridle his desires."<sup>14</sup>

**2. Student at the Community of Father Boucher (1694-1695).** This is the one year of Montfort's training at Paris which, strictly speaking, was not Sulpician. One of its principal differences with Saint Sulpice was its extreme poverty which called on its students to find bread for themselves even if it be by begging - a practice not tolerated by the Sulpicians.<sup>15</sup> It was during his short stay in Boucher's community that the young Montfort fell seriously ill and spent several months at the Hôtel-Dieu. His short life span would be interspersed with bouts of illness; Montfort looked upon them as privileged crosses although he sought practical means to be restored to health.

**3. Student at the Little Saint Sulpice (1695-1700).** This "little (or minor) seminary" was a true Sulpician "major" seminary. The only difference with "the seminary" founded by Olier, was the tuition for room and board (practically half of that of the seminary itself). The little seminary was for students who were materially poor and evidently did not offer living conditions comparable to that of the seminary. It was here that Louis Grignion spent his last five years of preparation for the priesthood and absorbed to the full the spirituality of the French School. Its trinitarian/christocentrism, its devotion to Mary including the vow of servitude, its apostolic outreach, its love for sacred scripture (especially for the Pauline letters), its intense mysticism, its pessimistic view of man on his own and its optimistic view of man living in Christ Jesus, were especially appealing to Montfort. These he developed in his own fashion while always remaining faithful to the overall Bérullian spirituality. Louis Marie Grignion was far more attracted to the mysticism of J.J. Olier than to its somewhat legalistic and constantly "balanced" interpretation by Tronson and Leschassier. Although respecting both Sulpicians,<sup>16</sup> Montfort the priest eventually gave full vent to the breath of the Spirit no matter where the Spirit may lead him. At his ordination in 1700, Montfort had so absorbed the spirituality of Saint Sulpice that he was himself a faithful - although quite creative - follower of Cardinal de Bérulle. Leschassier, embarrassed by his student's strange and singular behavior in his first few years of priesthood, publicly rejected and abandoned him.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Henri-Marie Boudon, *Dieu Seul ou le saint esclavage de l'admirable Mère de Dieu*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Boudon*, ed. Migne, Paris 1857, col. 377-586; *Les saintes voies de la croix*, in *ibid.*, 2 109-112.

<sup>14</sup> J.B. Blain, *Abrégé de la vie de Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort*, Centre International Montfortain, Rome, 1973, #86. This work of Blain who is also the biographer of Saint John Baptist de la Salle, dates from 1722-1724.

<sup>15</sup> De Fiores quotes the Sulpician General Assembly of 1691: "L'esprit de quêteur et de demandeur ... ne convenait nullement à celui de Saint Sulpice." (*Itinerario*, p.132.)

<sup>16</sup> This is especially true of Montfort's esteem for Tronson. In *True Devotion* no.244, the saint writes: "Father Tronson, Superior General of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, renowned for his rare prudence and consummate piety." Moreover, Montfort's *Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom* contains large sections attributable to Tronson.

In addition to these two primary source of his ministry - the Jesuits and the Sulpicians - Saint Louis de Montfort was definitely influenced by Dominican spirituality (like Olier, he was a member of the Dominican Third Order), especially as it is reflected in itinerant preaching and devotion to the rosary; the poverty intrinsic to Franciscan spirituality and its wisdom tradition expressed by Bonaventure were also integrated into his life. His readings brought him into contact with the mystics of the north, especially with the writings of the Dominican, Blessed Henry Suso, to whom he is somewhat indebted for the stress on Wisdom.<sup>17</sup> Through Crasset especially, he became enamored of the Greek Fathers of the Church and their realistic, vivid manner of speaking of humanity's divinization in Christ.<sup>18</sup>

His own missionary experiences as a preacher of parish missions and retreats strongly interpreted everything he learned. Since his writings are generally "for the poor and simple,"<sup>19</sup> he does not stress the familiar terminology of the French School (e.g., *anéantissement*, *states*, *rest*, *mysteries*, *adherence*, etc.) for it appears that he believed the terms would confuse his country-folk congregations.

The transforming dynamism inherent in public renewals of the vows of baptism was witnessed by the saint throughout his ministry and so became highlighted in his spirituality. Moreover, his own path to Jesus is evident throughout his writings which can, to quite a degree, be called autobiographical. The intrinsic connection between an evangelical life and evangelical preaching is so paramount in his own ministry that he incorporates it in his *Rule* for his *Missionaries of the Company of Mary*.<sup>20</sup>

## II. Montfort's Doctrine on Total Consecration or Holy Slavery

Father de Montfort's formulation of the meaning and the living of consecration, flowing from the sources mentioned above, well illustrates some of his similarities and dissimilarities with the doctrine of the French School.<sup>21</sup> It is often pointed out that Bérulle calls for an imitation of the *anéantissement* of the sacred humanity to the Divine Person of the Word; the missionary, for an imitation of Jesus in his loving dependence on Mary. Also, Bérulle founds his "donation" to Mary on the divine maternity and the queenship; Montfort, on the spiritual maternity (resulting from her motherhood of the Head of the Mystical Body) and her maternal authority which flows from it.<sup>22</sup> However, in addition to these commonly accepted points, there are other divergences and similarities which emerge from a study of the essential characteristics of the montfort consecration.

### A. Christocentric/Trinitarian

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *The Exemplar: The Life and Writings of Blessed Henry Suso, O.P.*, 2 vols., The Priory Press, Dubuque, 1962. For the dependence of Montfort on Suso, see J.P. Prévost, "Love of Eternal Wisdom" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 637.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Jean-Baptiste Crasset, *La véritable dévotion envers la Sainte Vierge établie et défendue*, Chez François Muguet, Paris 1679. Montfort has phrases which are especially reminiscent of the Greek Fathers, e.g., the Second Person of the Trinity is "the breast of the Father," "He Who is has willed to come to that which is not, to make that which is not, become He Who is."

<sup>19</sup> *True Devotion*, no.26.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary in God Alone*, pp. 422-424.

<sup>21</sup> For a study of Saint Louis de Montfort's doctrine on consecration and relevant bibliography, cf. P.Gaffney, "Consecration" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 199-234.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

Faithful to the French School, Saint Louis de Montfort vigorously stresses that all devotion must be centered on Christ Jesus, the incarnate Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity: "Jesus our Savior, 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 only teacher ... the only Lord ... the only Head ... the only model .. the only physician ... the only shepherd ... the only Way ... the only Truth ... the only Life ... He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires ... If devotion to Our Lady distracted us from Our Lord, we would have to reject it as a diabolical illusion."<sup>23</sup> Consecration - Holy Slavery of Love - must be focused on Christ as final end or else it springs from the devil. The vagabond missionary so clarifies this point that as Saint John Eudes insists (and Montfort follows him on this point) that Jesus and Mary are "one heart," so too the consecration response to Jesus and Mary is "one." Cardinal de Bérulle and J.J. Olier had made a vow of servitude to Mary and after some years, a vow of servitude to Jesus. Although there is no doubt whatsoever that these pillars of the French School grasped the christocentricity of any act of devotion, Saint Louis de Montfort explicitly speaks of only one consecration: "We consecrate ourselves at one and the same time to Mary and to Jesus."<sup>24</sup> The saint is quite forceful on this point: "The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus."<sup>25</sup> He does not counsel a consecration to Jesus and a separate act of consecration to God's Mother. Any evangelical consecration to Mary is a consecration to Jesus and a consecration to Jesus in accord with the Gospels must have a marian dimension. Jesus is the center, Our Lady is the means: "The Consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ, Wisdom Incarnate, through the hands of Mary."<sup>26</sup>

There are two other major points of difference between Montfort and the Bérullian School in regard to this first characteristic of consecration. Saint Louis de Montfort strongly insists that the beginning and goal of all creation - and therefore of consecration - is God the Father *who is Tenderness Itself*. Montfort, following the example of Bonaventure and Richard of St. Victor, describes the Trinity as the three subsisting relationships of love: Lover, Beloved, Loving.<sup>27</sup> This most fundamental thought of Montfort spirituality - God is Love, Tenderness - permeates everything the saint writes or does. The passkey to an understanding of Montfort is his experienced conviction that *God Alone is my Tenderness*.<sup>28</sup> Love language is his vocabulary. Expressions of his which shock the modern reader, like "slavery," "desire for the Cross," "the wrath of God," etc., must be defined only through the help of the dictionary of love. His writings, especially his 23,000 verses of *Cantiques*, are often a rendition of the Cantic of Canticles. It is no wonder that the term "spouse" is a favorite of his in describing spiritual relationships: spouse of the Cross, spouse of Jesus, spouse of Wisdom, spouse of the Holy Spirit. His language of love is so pronounced at times that it can be called "erotic."<sup>29</sup> This strong insistence on the tenderness and love of God can be considered as a fuller understanding and completion of Bérullian thought.

---

<sup>23</sup> True Devotion, no. 61, 62. The saint writes that devotion to Mary "is necessary, simply and solely because it is a way of reaching Jesus perfectly, loving him tenderly and serving him faithfully" (ibid., no. 62).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., no.125.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., no. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Love of the Eternal Wisdom, no.223.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. E. Cousins & P. Gaffney, "Trinity" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 1177-1190.

<sup>28</sup> Cantique 52:11 in *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1248. R. Laurentin has used this expression of Saint Louis de Montfort as the title of his work on the saint's spirituality: *Dieu Seul est ma tendresse*, O.E.I.L., Paris, 1984.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jean Audusseau, "Covenant" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 240, note 2: "We might even speak of an 'erotic' vocabulary if the term had not taken on, in our modern language, a connotation of license and immorality in the use of sex ... "

The second difference between the Bérullian school and the thought of Montfort concerning this first characteristic of consecration is even more striking. This christocentric goal is considered under the aspect of Wisdom. Although briefly touched upon by some members of the French School, it is for Montfort clear, explicit, and so well developed that it is the subject of his first and foundational work, *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*. Basing himself as no other spiritual author has ever done on the Wisdom literature of the Old and New Testaments, Jesus Wisdom is the goal of his spirituality.<sup>30</sup> Coupled with his stress on the tenderness of God, the tenderness of Jesus - which in part probably results from his understanding of Wisdom - Montfort's spirituality is basically lighthearted, joyful, free from what he terms the greatest obstacles to the acquisition of Wisdom: scruples, overconcern and fear. Jesus the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, is, when seen through the light of sapiential literature, the enfleshment of Wisdom's desire to play in the presence of God, "delighting in the human race."<sup>31</sup> Wisdom is the source of joyful, playful creativity as seen in the magnificent variety of beauty in creation itself.<sup>32</sup> Most importantly, Wisdom yearns for each individual: "Wisdom is for us and we are for Wisdom."<sup>33</sup> Montfort the mystic yearns to be married to Wisdom (feminine in biblical and romance languages), to rest in her bosom, to drink of her milk.<sup>34</sup> He considers the Cross as the bridal bed of Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom which brings forth triumphant new life.<sup>35</sup> Like Paul, Montfort ultimately sees Wisdom as Christ crucified: "Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom."<sup>36</sup> Unlike many of the French School, Saint Louis de Montfort writes little on the resurrection itself for it is in and through the Cross that the Easter triumph takes place.<sup>37</sup> His strong teaching in his *Letter to the Friends of the Cross* must be understood in the light of the Pauline doctrine of Wisdom as Christ crucified.

## B. Total

Following Boudon closely on this point, Saint Louis de Montfort lists everything which must be consecrated to the Lord. Since at his time, the doctrine of "our merits and our satisfactions" was much in vogue, these are also incorporated under the heading of "total."<sup>38</sup> No matter the categories Montfort may enumerate, what specifies his understanding of consecration is its absolute totality. It is not a transaction of things, it is not primarily a handing over of what we own. Louis de Montfort clarifies and completes the Bérullian doctrine on "vows of servitude" by insisting that consecration involves ultimately the person itself. In modern terms, we can say that Saint Louis Marie is teaching that the "I" becomes fully itself when it empties itself out into the Other, the God of Tenderness, through Jesus Wisdom, in the power of the Spirit. We are at all times a slave of God, says Montfort, through the nature of things (creation, redemption). It is our choice to become, therefore, either slaves of constraint by refusing to recognize our dependence on God, or slaves of love

---

<sup>30</sup> See the excellent article of M. Gilbert, "L'exégèse spirituelle de Montfort" in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, (104) 1982, pp. 678-691.

<sup>31</sup> In *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, no. 32, Saint Louis de Montfort paraphrases the Vulgate of Pr 8:30-31 ("ludens coram eo ... ludens in orbe terrarum"): "I (Wisdom) was with God and I disposed everything with such perfect precision and such pleasing variety that it was like playing a game [une espèce de jeu que je jouais ... ce jeu ineffable de la divine Sagesse] to entertain my Father and myself."

<sup>32</sup> *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, nos. 31-34.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, no.64.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Montfort's mystical hymns on the theme of Wisdom, especially *Cantiques* 78, 103, 124, 125, 126.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, no. 170-171; cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 167-172; *Cantique* 102 in *Oeuvres Complètes*, pp. 1423-1428.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, no. 122-124.

who rejoice in the reality of our continuous and spousal relationship to God.<sup>39</sup> This missionary is teaching that we already belong to the Lord; what we call "surrendering" is the loving and explicit affirmation that we are the Lord's and the Lord is ours.

### C. Baptismal

Although Saint Louis Marie did not leave us a special treatise on baptism, his understanding and love for this primordial sacrament - so common among the members of the French School - is found interwoven in many of his writings. He dropped his family name, Grignon, to be called simply the Father from Montfort for it was in the church of the village of Montfort that he was baptized into Christ. His parish missions reached their climax when he led a grandiose baptismal renewal procession. Each member of the parish who was making the mission "had a printed copy of the act of renewal - *the covenant contract with God* - which also listed practices for those who solemnly renewed their baptismal promises."<sup>40</sup>

Following the lead of Cardinal de Bérulle, Saint Louis de Montfort writes that the "perfect consecration to Jesus is but the 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 our baptism."<sup>41</sup> For this missionary, the terms "consecration" and "renewal of baptismal promises" are synonymous. The saint considers "consecration" in its strict sense as an act of *latría* which can have only God for its object. Perhaps nothing better describes Montfort's doctrine on consecration than his insistence that it is nothing more or less than the "perfect" living-out of our sacramental immersion into Christ Jesus. His clarity and emphasis on this point is one of his more important contributions to the French School.

### D. Marian

It is especially Saint Louis de Montfort's explanation of the essential marian dimension of consecration that has won for this vagabond missionary the special praise of the magisterium and popularity among the people of God. The goal of this baptismal renewal is clearly Jesus Wisdom. However, in Montfort's eyes, it is not possible to be consecrated to Jesus (an act of *latría*) without *at the same time* being consecrated to Mary (an act of *dulia*).

The saint's explanation of this important point flows directly from the French School's insistence on the Incarnation, the mystery of Jesus living in Mary. "It was in this mystery that Jesus anticipated all subsequent mysteries of his life by his willing acceptance of them. Consequently, this mystery is a summary of all his mysteries since it contains the intention and the grace of all."<sup>42</sup> The beginning contains what follows in the sense that it is the never-to-be-repealed law that governs everything flowing from it; it transcends and makes immanent whatever results from it. Therefore, the role of Mary in the Incarnation is her divinely willed role in *all* salvation history. And Saint Louis de Montfort insists with the Gospel of Luke that Our Lady at the Incarnation is the *Yes*, the *fiat* of all creation to the inbreaking of salvation. In her, through her *Yes* to God's grace, our redemption - the *Incarnate* Wisdom - comes to be. Her consent is, in Montfort's thinking, hypothetically necessary, i.e., not necessary *absolutely* but necessary in the present (which is the only)

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 68-77.

<sup>40</sup> J. Hémerly, "Baptism" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, p. 49.

<sup>41</sup> *True Devotion*, no. 120.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 248.



divinely willed order of salvation. It is moreover a *salvific, representative consent, freely given* in the name of the entire human race and of creation itself. Jesus who is, in his person, the redemptive consecration of this universe, *comes to be* through God's grace and Mary's representative consent.<sup>43</sup> Mary is "the little girl"<sup>44</sup> of the sinful, rebellious, estranged human family who in the name of all, opens the door of creation to Eternal Wisdom so that He may become our enfleshed, redeeming brother in and through her faith-filled womb. "In a word, He who is has willed to come to that which is not, and to make that which is not, become He Who is and He has done this perfectly in giving himself and subjecting Himself entirely to the young Virgin Mary without ceasing to be in time He Who is from all eternity."<sup>45</sup> Mary, "the mediatrix of intercession," is the Yes to God's desire to redeem us in and through Jesus, the one "Mediator of redemption."<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, our life in Christ Jesus, our rebirth through baptism - like all events of salvation history - bears the imprint of Mary's faith. The *perfect* renewal of our vows of baptism calls for the loving recognition of her intrinsic role in our redemption. We are to join in with Mary's *Yes* to the Lord. Or more according to the language of Montfort, we are to "lose ourselves in Mary,"<sup>47</sup> i.e., share in her faith-filled, total surrender to the Father, through Christ Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. Any renewal of baptismal promises, any consecration to Jesus is at the same time, a consecration to Mary. Montfort calls for an explicit, lived-out recognition of this truth.

Saint Louis de Montfort's clarification of Mary's role in Christian life is also one of his more important gifts to the French School. Moreover, he calls for a marian and therefore christocentric way of life: "to do all our actions *by* Mary, *with* Mary, *in* Mary and *for* Mary so that we may do them all the more perfectly *by* Jesus, *with* Jesus, *in* Jesus and *for* Jesus."<sup>48</sup>

## E. Apostolic

Since the consecration is the perfect renewal of baptism, it is of its very nature an evangelizing outreach, spurring Christians on to serve their brothers and sisters who are - and this applies in a special way to the outcasts of society - "the very portraits of Jesus Christ."<sup>49</sup> As so many authors who are rooted in the Bérullian School, Louis de Montfort is caught up with the burning desire "to destroy sin and establish the reign of Jesus Christ over that of the corrupt world."<sup>50</sup> Those who have made the consecration are described as "those who desire only that the glory and the kingdom of Jesus may come through his Mother and who do all they can to bring this about."<sup>51</sup> His purpose in preaching total consecration is to form "a great squadron of valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, a squadron of men and women to combat the world, ... true apostles of the end times."<sup>52</sup> Montfort especially dedicates himself - and the

---

<sup>43</sup> For a study of Montfort's understanding of the nature of Mary's consent at the Incarnation, cf. P. Gaffney, "Mary" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 706-708.

<sup>44</sup> *True Devotion*, no. 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 157.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 86; cf. no. 83-85.

<sup>47</sup> *Secret of Mary*, no. 70; cf. *True Devotion*, no. 222, 264.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, no. 257.

<sup>49</sup> *Cantique 20:17* in *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 1030.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Secret of Mary*, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, no. 133.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 114, 58; cf. no. 23-27. For an explanation of Montfort's unique concept of the end-times, cf. S. De Fiores, "End Times" in *Jesus Living in Mary*, pp. 345-368.

community of priests he so ardently prays for<sup>53</sup> - to the apostolic formation of laymen and women so that they may become a kingdom-legion of Mary who will join forces with "priests of fire" to "reform the Church and renew the face of the earth."<sup>54</sup> Montfort's whole purpose in promoting consecration is summed up in one word: "*the kingdom!*"<sup>55</sup>

It appears to be clear that Saint Louis de Montfort depends heavily upon the Bérullian school of spirituality and is, in fact, one of its greatest proponents. Nonetheless, especially the saint's unique and detailed stress on the *goal* of the journey - Wisdom incarnate, the Beloved within the Triune Love - and the *means* - a specific marian path of perfection - make it apparent that his divergences with the French School are not to be minimized.

*P. Gaffney, s.m.m.*

*Presented at the Conference on the French School of Spirituality  
Atlanta, GA  
August, 1995*

---

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Prayer for Missionaries, pp. 401-410.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., no.17. So unlike Bérulle, Condren, Olier and St. John Eudes, Louis de Montfort's apostolate remains almost exclusively a preacher of parish missions and retreats, never becoming involved in the education of the clergy. He goes so far as to refuse explicitly any member of his Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary to be teachers in schools, even in seminaries. Cf. Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary in God Alone, no.2.

<sup>55</sup> Saint Louis Marie describes the True Devotion as "the preparation for the reign of Jesus Christ" (no. 227). His burning desire is to "establish the reign of Jesus Christ." (cf. Secret of Mary, no.59.)