

5. THE MONTFORTIAN FAMILY

(Fr. Marcel Gendrot, smm)

I. Father de Montfort, the Founder

Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort was just over 27 years old when he was ordained priest in Paris on 5 June 1700. At the end of September that year he arrived in the community of Saint-Clément in Nantes, which was run by a priest from Saint-Sulpice, M. Lévêque. He was hoping to find there a place suited to his own missionary aspirations. But he was profoundly disappointed.

On 6 December he wrote to his former spiritual director in Saint-Sulpice, M. Leschassier, about his disappointment. This letter (L 5) is the first indication we have of his desire to found something.

“I have not found here what I had hoped for and what led me to leave such a holy place as St. Sulpice, almost against my better judgement. My intention was, as yours was too, to prepare for mission-work and especially for teaching catechism to the poor, since this is what attracts me most. But I am not doing that at all and I do not think that I shall ever do it here... I know very well, my dear Father, that I am not worthy to do such honourable work, but *when I see the needs of the Church I cannot help pleading continually for a small and poor band of good priests to do this work* under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin...”

On 5 July 1701, Louis Marie gave an account to M. Leschassier of the 10-day mission he had been able to give in Grandchamps (cf. L 8). It had been a great joy for him, but it was not enough to keep him in Nantes. He needed a much wider field, and he needed people to work with him.

Louis Marie had two great friends in Rennes and Paris: Poullart des Places and Jean-Baptiste Blain. In their confidential sharing with one another, they will certainly have spoken about their plans.

Claude Poullart des Places had his own great projects, but they were quite different to those of Louis Marie. But why could not these projects be combined and complete one another?

“You know,” said the young Claude, “that for some time now I have been distributing all I have at my disposal to help poor students to follow their courses of study... That is what I would like to devote myself to, gathering them together in a house... If God grants me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will prepare them for you, and it will be for you to set them to work. In this way we will both be satisfied.” This was the first draft of the contract that M. Grignon would later recall to the minds of the successors of Poullart de Places.

Jean-Baptiste Blain dreamt of a more tranquil life. And yet, in 1702, on the occasion of a visit to Paris by M. Grignon, he himself felt called: “I listened very carefully to all that was said about him and could not help wondering how anyone could regard him as a saint while doubting that he was on the right way to sanctity. As I felt greatly inclined to imitate him and be his companion, I was the more interested in what concerned him and anxious to know how exactly I should rightly judge him.”

Returning to Poitiers, Louis Marie went back to the Hôpital Générale and its poor inmates. There, he organised the first “Wisdom” community: a dozen sick and crippled women, under the direction of a pious, blind woman. It was an ephemeral community that gave rise to

jealousy, but provided the first Daughter of Wisdom, *Marie-Louise de Jésus* with an impulse of the heart and a familiarity with spiritual things.

The time was approaching when the material and spiritual renewal that he had undertaken at the hospital would once again brew up a storm and grant the missionary his liberty. From then on he could follow his own great inclination: “teaching catechism to the poor.”

The Bishop of Poitiers offered him board and lodging as the director of the House of Penitents, and gave him leisure to “spread himself around the town”. The poorer quarters would be the favoured place for his apostolate.

One day when he was hearing confessions in the House of Penitents, a man came in to pray. When he had finished the confessions, the missionary approached this young man and engaged him in conversation. *Mathurin Rangeard* told him that the Capuchin Fathers had preached a mission in his own village. He was then making ready to join them as a lay brother. M. Grignon, quite simply, but with an inspired air, told him: “It was not by chance, but really providentially, that you came in here. Would you not like to help the missionaries in their work? Follow me; that is your sure vocation.”

As in the Gospel, the young man set himself to follow him. *Brother Mathurin*, born in 1687, was to be the first “Montfortian”. He was to follow Father de Montfort and his successors in all their missions, right up to his death in 1760.

Five years after his ordination, Father de Montfort had sketched out the way forward: *Marie-Louise de Jésus* and *Mathurin Rangeard* were opening the route of the Montfortian foundations...

It was to be a modest little seed in a field with limited dimensions. But the seed was sown. It was to germinate and its branches were to gradually and slowly spread out. In the course of the 20th century, the Montfortian Family would take its modest place in the wide world...

Here we give a few stages, in the lifetime of the Founder.

1707-1708. Father de Montfort spent some time in the hermitage of Saint-Lazare in Montfort-la-Cane. With two young men who had no vows, Mathurin and Jean, he repaired the chapel, summoned his neighbours to prayer, fed the poor, and trained his two “postulants” in prayer and sacrifice. This was the first Montfortian “community”.

1713. Louis Marie spent twenty-four hours in Poitiers. He got Catherine Brunet to join Marie-Louise.

1715. In La Rochelle, the Montfortian Family took off: in February, *Adrien Vatel* joined Louis Marie; on 22 August, four young women made an official commitment to the Daughters of Wisdom—they were *Marie-Louise Trichet*, *Catherine Brunet*, *Marie Valteau* and *Marie Régnier*. The first community of La Sagesse was on its way.

1715 (September). In Fontenay, *René Mulot* joined Louis Marie.

1716 (28 April). Louis Marie de Montfort died in the middle of a mission in St-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. His will (cf. *God Alone*, pg. 506), dictated and signed on 27 April, mentions *four Brothers* “who joined me in a life of obedience and poverty”: Nicolas of Poitiers, Philippe of Nantes, Louis of La Rochelle, and Gabriel, “who is at present with me”, and then *three laymen* without any vows: Jacques, Jean, and Mathurin. We need to add to this number *two priests* without vows, René Mulot and Adrien Vatel. In all, then, nine persons and the community of La Sagesse in La Rochelle.

After the mission in St-Laurent and the burial of M. Grignon, one part of the group (the two priests, Brother Mathurin...) went into retirement in the presbytery of Saint-Pompain. It was not until Lent 1718 that the exit from the Cenacle began, thanks to a mission, announced without notice to the missionaries by the parish-priest of Saint-Etienne-de-Loges. From that time on, the “hermits” of Saint-Pompain would move out more and more on their mission journeys...

Throughout their history, and in spite of the inevitable gap between their lived experience and the ideal they were pursuing, they kept in mind the aim given by Montfort himself to the pilgrims of Saint-Pompain: “You will make this pilgrimage for the following intentions: Firstly, to obtain from God through Mary's intercession good missionaries, who will follow the example of the apostles by complete abandonment to divine Providence and the practice of virtue under the protection of our Lady; secondly, to obtain the gift of wisdom in order to know, love and practise the truths of our faith and to lead others to Christ.”

II. The Three Congregations: Origin - Mission - History

The difficulty in the following pages is to present in a few words a history which requires several volumes. The reader must not look here for answers to the many questions for which the answers can only be found in other documents and in historical research.

1. The Missionaries of the Company of Mary

Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, in an article by Fr. Pierluigi Nava, smm, gives in 18 pages (pgs. 181-198), the history, mission and spirit of the Company of Mary. We can refer to it with interest.

Around 1713, Louis Marie de Montfort wrote the *Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary*, preceded by the *Prayer for Missionaries*, and followed by the *Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*. This triptych represents the burning heart of the apostle who mobilises all people of good will and gives them their apostolic tasks.

Only seven months after his priestly ordination, Louis Marie, faced with “the needs of the Church”, was dreaming of “a small and poor band of good priests” who would go from parish to parish, teaching catechism to the poor people, “under the banner and protection of the Blessed Virgin” (cf. L 5).

Two years later (August 1702), it seems he had proposed to two of his friends that they should enter into his project. Jean-Baptiste Blain hesitated seriously: “I felt greatly inclined to imitate him and be his companion.” Claude Poullart des Places, on the other hand, did not feel called to the missions, but he was ready to help in the project: “If God grants me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will prepare them for you, and it will be for you to set them to work. In this way we will both be satisfied.” (Besnard, Montfort, vol. I, pg. 104).

What Montfort wanted was a company of *priests* (cf. MR 1), though that did not exclude lay associates (cf. MR 4). The aim was to proclaim the Gospel to the poor; by means of catechesis (cf. 79-91) and the renewal of Baptismal promises (cf. MR 56); under the eyes of, and with the help of Mary (PM 11-13). And the missionaries must always be preoccupied with “the needs of the Church” (cf. L 5), which might differ according to time and circumstances.

When Fr. de Montfort went in 1713 to meet the students of Poullart des Places and the one who had succeeded the Founder, Fr. Bouic, three topics were high on the agenda. They set

forth the spirit of the missionary and indicate, for his followers, the main lines to keep in mind: *the spirit of poverty*, in the manner of the apostles (cf. Acts 3,6); *the Blessed Virgin*, his favourite theme; and *the spirit of the Gospel*, which is foolishness for the world (cf. Besnard, Montfort, vol. I, pgs. 105-106; Clorivière, Montfort, pg. 313).

“This is where the mystery lies, where human wisdom cannot penetrate and which has been revealed only to the little ones and the humble of heart: *abscondisti haec a sapientibus et revelasti ea parvulis* (Matt 11, 25). He made us all kneel down, M. Bouic added, to pray to God and ask him for that divine wisdom of which he had just been speaking to us, and he did this in such lively terms, with such animated features and such sublime thoughts, that we seemed to be listening to an angel.”

2. The Daughters of Wisdom

As with the Company of Mary, we can consult *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, pgs. 281-298, for more details on the topic “Daughters of Wisdom”.

Montfort had hesitated regarding the name to be given to his female congregation. He had written “Daughters of Providence”, then he corrected himself, writing “Wisdom” above “Providence” (cf. *God Alone*, pg. 477, notes 1 and 2). The first title corresponds to an inclination of his heart, but the second represents a more fundamental attraction: “if [wisdom] consisted in doing nothing new for God, in undertaking nothing for His glory for fear of being spoken about, then the Apostles were wrong in leaving Jerusalem; they should have remained shut up in the Caenaculum...” (Blain, *Summary*, pg. 337). By the foolishness of their lives, the Daughters of Wisdom would be witnesses to the Gospel in the midst of the world.

The foundation of this congregation is quite extraordinary. Montfort arrived at the General Hospital in Poitiers in 1701. Poverty and disorder reigned in this institution. The young chaplain drew up a plan of reform, to achieve greater economy and an exact observance of the rules. The staff who dedicated themselves to the poor had need of training, enshrined in a rule of life. But the governing body rejected it.

Montfort, never short of new ideas, thought up a sort of parable. He gathered together, in a room in the hospital, a dozen of the inmates: infirm, handicapped by nature, but pious women with great spiritual wealth. Over the door, he wrote: Wisdom; and on a cross he expressed in a naïve and meaningful way, a programme of spiritual life centred on Jesus Christ, Wisdom incarnate: we must renounce ourselves and carry our cross after Jesus Christ, under the guidance of Mary.

This little group was not to last more than a few months: from November 1702 to March 1703. But already the chaplain had met the woman who was to take up the baton: *Marie-Louise Trichet*. This young woman, 18 years old, had heard tell of the new chaplain and of his reputation for holiness. She presented herself at his confessional:

“Who sent you to me?” asked the confessor. “It was my sister.” “No, it was not your sister; it was the Blessed Virgin.”

Marie-Louise put herself under the direction of this man that she considered a saint. She took part in a retreat that he preached at the Hospital at Pentecost 1702. From then on, her only thought was to consecrate herself to God. She pressed her director to help her to realise her aim.

“Come and live in the hospital.”

The young woman went off to find the Bishop and told him of this proposal. “Impossible! There is no vacancy on the board.” For someone of her standing, any place other than a board-member was unthinkable.

“That does not matter... If these gentlemen will not accept me as a member of the board, perhaps they will not refuse to admit me as a poor person!”

And so the bourgeois young lady came to live in the hospital for the service of the poor. More than that, she wanted to live with them and like them, eating their black bread and their coarse soup... And it was in this context that the chaplain one day had her called: “My daughter, the idea has come to me to change your clothing.” On 2 February 1703, her spiritual Father gave his daughter in God a new name. He did this with a charming simplicity:

“I am called Louis Marie, you are called Marie-Louise; add to this the name of Jesus, whom you are taking as your sole heritage.”

And that day, Marie-Louise Trichet became Marie-Louise de Jésus, the first Daughter of Wisdom...

Then there began the long wait for this woman who wanted to live a true religious life. The reforms introduced by Montfort had brought a little more comfort for the poor people, but a great deal of annoyance for the administrators: the “Wisdom” group was disbanded and Montfort himself had to leave Poitiers for the Salpêtrière.

He came back again in 1704, but only for a short time: a few months more as chaplain at the hospital, then a few months as a missionary in the back-streets of the town. But very soon the missionary understood that he had to leave the diocese...

At the beginning of Lent in 1706, he wrote a farewell letter to his “dear people of Montbernage, Saint-Saturnin, Saint-Simplicien, the Resurrection, and others...”

To Marie-Louise, as a form of encouragement, he said in a prophetic tone: “*Don’t leave here for ten years*. If the establishment of the Daughters of Wisdom comes about only at the end of that time, God will be satisfied and his plans accomplished...”

So for ten years, Marie-Louise remained alone in the overcrowded hospital, a governor and bursar without the titles, for many years. Her passion was: the poor to be fed, to be cared for and clothed... One day, in the heart of a terrible winter, she was heard to murmur: “Oh, I wish I could be stuff to clothe them in!”

In 1713, Montfort returned to Poitiers, but was not welcome in the hospital, or in the diocese. Nevertheless he had time to give Marie-Louise de Jésus her first companion, *Catherine Brunet*.

Two years later Montfort wrote from La Rochelle to his two spiritual daughters one of those demanding and convincing letters that he had the secret of writing (cf. L 27):

“I know you are doing a great deal of good where you are, but you will do infinitely more away from home and we know that since the time of Abraham right up to the time of our Lord and even to our own day, God sends his greatest servants out of their own country.”

Marie-Louise and Catherine needed great courage and great decisiveness to tear themselves away from their own task and their own country. They had to face opposition from the administrators, the anger of Mme Trichet, the blame of Marie Brunet and all around. They had to suffer and struggle to obey, in the face of all this, this new call from God.

So after the poor people of Poitiers, it was the charitable schools of La Rochelle. There, Marie-Louise and her first companions were going to show themselves to be marvellous teachers. In just a short time, the school was filled with four hundred little girls whose discipline, piety and enthusiasm for work attracted the admiration of the Bishop and the people of the district.

Poitiers had been the cradle of the congregation. La Rochelle was the place where it took its first steps. On 1 August 1715, Mgr. Etienne de Champflour approved the Rules of the Daughters of Wisdom. On 22 August 1715, the first community of La Sagesse—*Marie-Louise de Jésus, Catherine Brunet, Marie Valteau, Marie Régnier*—committed themselves to follow this Rule of life, wherever the needs of the Church might call them, and that in the double direction, charitable and missionary, as indicated by the Founder: *Call yourselves the Community of the Daughters of Wisdom for the education of children and the care of the poor.* (L 29).

When the Founder died in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre on 28 April 1716, the congregation numbered only four religious. But the woman who was his collaborator in the foundation, *Marie-Louise de Jésus*, was a courageous person who knew what she wanted and wanted what she knew.

After the premature death of the father of the family, Marie-Louise was alone for 43 years, facing serious crises, such as the division of the Congregation (cf. the episode of the “Bourginettes” in La Rochelle: 1719-1725). She was alone also in the task of forming her first companions. Alone in guiding the foundation of new communities that began to multiply, often without any assured resources: small charitable schools, the visiting and care of the sick, the running of hospitals...

When she died in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre on 28 April 1759, La Sagesse numbered 122 religious, spread over 35 communities. Already 40 had gone to the Father’s House. When the great Revolution broke out (1789), there were 80 establishments with 360 Sisters. All of them, except for those in Brest, were expelled from their houses. Thirty-four paid with their lives for their loyalty to the Church, a fidelity that reminds us of the beautiful pages of the acts of the martyrs.

From 1821 until 1841, *Father Gabriel Deshayes*, Superior General, gave a great impulse to the Montfortian Family. When he arrived, there were 96 houses with 778 religious and novices. At his death, 1,668 religious were at work in 128 establishments. During his generalate, 32 establishments had been opened.

3. The Brothers of St. Gabriel

It will be good to have recourse once again to *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, (cf. pgs. 117-126). See also the important work of Brother Louis Bauvineau on the history of the Brothers of St Gabriel, as well as Volume XIII of the collection *Documents et recherches* on “Brother Eugène-Marie”, International Montfortian Centre, 1997.

Scarcely ordained priest, in 1700, Louis Marie Grignon, witnessing the “needs of the Church”, was dreaming of a group of collaborators who would devote themselves to the “mission”. He was looking for “missionary priests”. He found some Brothers, or some laymen in general, who worked with him in the mission. In 1705, it was *Mathurin Rangeard*, in Poitiers; in 1707, it was *Jean*, in Montfort-la-Cane.

Brother Jean-Baptiste Rolandeau, in the article in the *Handbook*, has much to say concerning these first companions of Montfort in the mission: *Mathurin, Jean, Jacques, Pierre, Gabriel, Philippe from Nantes, Louis from La Rochelle*.

The Will of Fr. de Montfort, dated 27 April 1716, recalls some of these names (cf. *God Alone*, pgs 506-7): “the four Brothers who joined me in a life of obedience and poverty; namely, Brother Nicholas of Poitiers, Brother Philip of Nantes, Brother Louis of La Rochelle, and Brother Gabriel, who is at present with me...” and three committed laymen: Jacques, Jean and Mathurin.

So there we have seven young men who were the companions of the missionary for the mission, and who became, one way or another, his heirs. Their work had been: 1 - sharing in the parish mission, by catechesis, the singing of his hymns, the recitation of the Rosary, the organisation of the processions... 2. - charitable schools, only in the later years of the missionary and in the context of the pastoral options of the diocese of La Rochelle.

The Will mentions explicitly: “my small pieces of furniture and my mission books, to be preserved for the use of the four Brothers ... and for the use of those whom divine Providence will call into the same community of the Holy Spirit ... a small house given by a good lady of rank. If there is no possibility of building there, it should be put at the disposal of the Brothers of the community of the Holy Spirit to conduct charity schools ... All the pieces of furniture at present at Nantes are for the use of the Brothers who run the school, as long as the school remains there.”

The *Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary* provides for “Lay Brothers ... to take care of temporal affairs” (MR 4), but in a context that excludes teaching the young (cf. MR 2) but not anything that might help the missionaries in the mission: the cooking, the little shop, the care of the mule and leading it.

It is certain that Fr. de Montfort and his successors benefited greatly from the collaboration of the Lay Brothers, to the extent that the Company of Mary has always considered the dual title Fathers-Brothers as a constitutive part of its missionary vocation.

Grandet, the first biographer of Fr. de Montfort (published in Nantes, 1724), enumerates the “inventive strategies and means used by Monsieur de Montfort to perpetuate the fruits of his missions” (English version 2005, pgs. 200-201). The first of these means is “The establishment of Christian schools”.

A century later, *Fr. Joseph Dalin*, assistant to Fr. Gabriel Deshayes, recalled the integration of the school in the concerns of the missionaries:

“We will not end this Chapter on the Community of the Holy Spirit without speaking about, for the recognition and admiration of our readers, the works and the virtues of these humble Brothers of the Holy Spirit, who form such an interesting part of the community. Destined by Montfort to accompany and help the missionaries, then to conduct charitable schools, to care for the sick and to look after the temporal affairs of the two communities, we see them, right from the earliest years, carrying out zealously these modest functions, and this zeal has become hereditary among them...” (J. Dalin, *Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, published 1839, pg. 454).

Such was the magnificent tree planted by Fr. de Montfort, which was, over the years and according to the “needs of the Church”, to put forth new branches and bear new fruit.

In the aftermath of the religious crises of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, *Fr. Gabriel Deshayes*, named superior in Saint-Laurent, was to give a new impetus to the

foundations of Saint Louis Marie, and to develop the teaching branch which was to take the name of Brothers of St. Gabriel. From Auray, Gabriel Deshayes sent some recruits to St-Laurent. Arriving there in 1821, he already had 22 postulants in 1822. He drew up statutes in the tradition of Auray and St-Laurent. In 1823, he obtained the royal approval under the title of *Brothers of Christian Instruction of the Holy Spirit*, as a charitable association for the instruction of youth for five departments.

In 1824 he had the joy of accepting the religious vows of 42 Brothers. In 1825, Brother Augustin, one of the recruits from Auray, was named Director of the Brothers, and Brother Siméon, a recruit from St-Laurent, was appointed novice-master. This unity favoured both spiritual growth and the foundation of schools.

Until 1835 the house of the missionaries was the home of both the teaching Brothers and the “working” Brothers. But, as it was found to be more and more rather too small, Gabriel Deshayes had the idea of buying a house from the Daughters of Wisdom, that was just a few paces from the house of the missionaries. A “migration” was set afoot. Those devoted to the domestic services would remain, preferably in the Holy Spirit house, while the teaching Brothers would go across to the Maison Supiot, as it was called. They all still had the same superior, and there was great flexibility regarding passing from one to the other.

On 15 October 1835, Mgr. Soyer, the Bishop of Luçon, blessed the chapel of the new dwelling. The next day, Fr. Deshayes led his thirty-three Brothers and novices to the “Maison Supiot” ... There followed an impressive series of installations useful to the life of the new community... After that it was very easy to give a spontaneous new name: “Saint-Gabriel”. Let’s go to Saint Gabriel.

In twenty years as Superior General, Fr. Deshayes was to found 78 primary schools. At the time of his death in 1841, 47 of them were still open, with ninety-nine Brothers, while waiting for the Congregation of St Gabriel to begin its spread around the world.

III. Montfortian Associations

The *Handbook* has much to say on this topic (cf. pgs. 31-44).¹ It speaks of Montfort and Associations, of the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts, and of associations in the Church of today. Here we propose simply to sketch out the essential points, which might lead to a deeper study.

1. Montfort and Associations

In the time of Montfort, spiritual and charitable associations abounded, often linked to Religious Orders or Monasteries, sometimes independent of these. The associations were proposed to the faithful to help them to live their Christian lives to the full. Montfort the missionary knew how to use the existing structures and, as occasion arose, he did not hesitate to create new ones.

Very early on, he himself turned to associations for support. As a student in Rennes, he joined, at the age of 15 or 16, a group of young people who used to meet with M. Bellier, the chaplain to the Hôpital Saint-Yves. This holy priest formed them for a life of prayer and for an apostolate for the benefit of the sick; he used to speak to them also of the missions in which he had taken part, under the direction of M. Leuduger.

Later on, Louis Marie joined the Marian sodality for the senior students, led by Fr. Prévost. The programme of this sodality was aimed, under the aegis and protection of the Blessed

Virgin, at an interior formation and the witness of one's life. By the act of offering, the members undertook to honour Mary with a special form of cult.

In Paris, Louis Marie obtained the permission of his superiors to found a small group of "slaves of Jesus through Mary" (Blain, *ib.*, 50; TD 244).

After he became a priest, his missionary sense expressed itself through associations. His concern, at the end of a mission, was to leave in place various works that would ensure and prolong the fruits of the mission. He thought of all categories of the faithful and all their various inclinations.

The Confraternity of the Rosary. In all his missions and retreats, he made himself the apostle of the Rosary. In his day, this was the most widespread form of popular piety. He has left us, in *The Secret of the Rosary*, an echo of his teaching and his missionary practice. After ten years of priesthood and of apostolic endeavour, he asked to be affiliated to the Third Order of Saint Dominic. In 1712, he obtained from the Master General of the Dominicans the faculty of introducing people into the Confraternity (cf. L 23).

The Confraternity of the White Penitents. For them, he wrote a well-organised rule of Christian living (cf. *God Alone*, pg. 495), and he sent the group in Saint-Pompain on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saumur, to obtain the grace of holy missionaries and the gift of wisdom (cf. *God Alone*, pgs. 495-498).

The Forty-four Virgins. He wrote a rule for these, with the aim of encouraging those young women who wished to consecrate themselves to God in the world (cf. *God Alone*, pgs. 494-495).

The 'Friends of the Cross'. He saw in this association a great means of perseverance and of sanctification. For them, he wrote at Rennes in 1714 the *Letter to the Friends of the Cross*.

The Confraternity of St. Michael. He wrote and obtained approval for the rule of this confraternity in order to help soldiers who had taken part in his mission (for example in Dinan, Montfort and La Rochelle) to remain faithful to their good dispositions.

By way of conclusion, we can say: all the faithful, by dint of their baptism, are full members of Jesus Christ and of his Church. All are called to holiness, that is to the perfection of charity, including its apostolic dimension. It was because he knew that God called them to holiness and to the service of the Church's mission, that Montfort established and left behind him those structures of support and witness that the various associations provided.

2. The Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts

The associations we have already mentioned are aimed principally at providing durability for the fruits of his missions and retreats, for the benefit of parish communities or groups of the faithful.

Louis Marie had in his heart the idea of another association that he wanted to see come into existence, but which he was unable to bring about during his own lifetime. We are speaking of a "confraternity" that would gather together and unite those of the faithful who had decided to enter into the spiritual and apostolic way that he describes in *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, a confraternity involving a "perfect consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary" (cf. TD 121-130).

"Those who desire to take up this special devotion, (which has not been erected into a confraternity, although this would be desirable), should spend at least twelve days in

emptying themselves of the spirit of the world, which is opposed to the spirit of Jesus... They should then spend three weeks imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus through the most Blessed Virgin..." (TD 227).

As a seminarian in Paris, Louis Marie, with the consent of his superiors, had created a "society of slaves of Jesus in Mary." What gave rise to this initiative was the book of M. Boudon, *Le saint esclavage de l'admirable Mère de Dieu* (The holy slavery of the admirable Mother of God). This book had a profound influence on him and guided his doctrinal and spiritual research. His missionary experience confirmed him in this path. But the premature death of our Founder did not allow the creation of a particular confraternity that would teach generous souls to renew in a perfect manner the promises of their baptism by total consecration to Jesus through Mary (cf. TD 120).

It was to be many years before the spiritual movement inspired by the *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* would give birth to the *Confraternity of Mary Queen of Our Hearts*.

It was in 1899, in Canada, that this association saw the light of day. In establishing it in his own diocese. Mgr. J. T. Duhamel, the Bishop of Ottawa, responded to the wishes of the Montfortians, to the desires of the faithful, and to his own personal piety. This confraternity was established in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ottawa (cf. the review *La Règne de Jésus par Marie*, no. 1, January 1900). The aim of this confraternity was: to establish and extend the reign of Mary in our souls so as to bring about more perfectly the reign of Jesus Christ. Its practices: to make one's consecration to the Blessed Virgin, as far as possible according to the formula indicated by Louis Marie de Montfort; to renew this consecration each day with a short prayer; and finally, to take steps to live in dependence on Mary and act always in union with her.

The title "Mary, Queen of Our Hearts" came directly from the heart of Montfort. As a student at Saint-Sulpice, he knew of the chapel established by M. Tronson at Issy, which was dedicated to Mary, Queen of Our Hearts. In Montbernage, a suburb of Poitiers, in 1706, he converted a barn into a place of prayer and set up a statue of the Blessed Virgin under the title of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts, for the inhabitants of the district. At Saint-Donatien in Nantes in 1710, he changed the name of a little chapel to "Mary, Queen of Our Hearts".

This title given to Mary was familiar and dear to the missionary: "As the kingdom of Jesus Christ exists primarily in the heart or interior of man... so the kingdom of the Blessed Virgin is principally in the interior of man... So we may call her, as the saints do, Queen of our hearts" (TD 38).

No sooner was the confraternity established than it began to attract members: faithful souls, religious, members of the clergy... The following year, a second confraternity was founded in France, in the diocese of Luçon, with its headquarters in St-Laurent-sur-Sèvre. Such confraternities quickly began to multiply: in France, in Europe, in America, Asia and Africa. In 1965 there were some 140 centres with several thousands of members...

In 1907, there appeared an *Association of Priests of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts*, which had a twofold aim: 1 - to sanctify the priestly life by the practice of the perfect devotion to Mary as taught by St. Louis Marie; 2 - to make of this devotion a powerful means of apostolate to establish through Mary the reign of Jesus, in both individuals and in families. Pius X had himself inscribed in the register of this association.

In 1913, a decree of Pius X raised the confraternity in Rome to become an Archconfraternity, to which all the confraternities should be attached. The spread of the confraternity was

constant until the middle of the 20th century, when the number of members was approaching 500,000. And this number represented only a small proportion of all those who had made their consecration according to the spirit of St Louis Marie, for not all those who had consecrated themselves were registered as members of the association.

Beginning in the 1950s, the confraternity was to experience the turbulence taking place in both society and the Church. So it was that, in the 1960s, one could speak of a Marian question, and even of a “Marian crisis”, in the ten years following the Second Vatican Council. For many people, the confraternity was seen as a simple “pious union”, an aid to personal piety.

And yet, The Holy See, by a rescript of 16 July 1955, had declared this pious union to be an *association proper to the Company of Mary*, in the manner of a Third Order in relation to a Religious Order. It became, as it were, an extension of the congregation, to propagate zealously the reign of Jesus Christ through Mary. On 5 July 1956, the two associations of the faithful and of the priests received the approval of the Holy See for their new statutes. Attempts at renewal and restructuring were undertaken here and there, with more or less conclusive results.

Vatican Council II inspired renewal in all structures and associations in order for them to open to the Spirit of the new Pentecost. After accomplishing the *aggiornamento* of its own constitution, the Company of Mary still had to update the statutes of its two associations and to renew the spirit of both organizations. An international commission for Montfortian associations was formed in the late 1980s, and new statutes were proposed and approved for the confraternity, which had now become the *Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts*.

Work on the renewal of the two associations continued until, on 26 April 2001, definitive new Statutes were approved by the Holy See (see the [Decree of Approval](#)), and the two separate associations were again combined into one, to be known as the *Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts*. A month later, on 22 May 2001, the Holy See issued a rescript granting a Plenary Indulgence to all those enrolled in the Association 1. on the day of their enrolment; 2. on various other feasts and solemnities (see the [Rescript of the Sacred Penitentiary](#)).

The new [Statutes](#) of the *Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts* allow for centres of the association in various parts of the world, each with a Director appointed by the Director General of the Association who is the Superior General for the time being of the Company of Mary. They also give a clear presentation of the *nature* of the Association, which is declared to be such that it “gathers together the faithful, clerics or lay, who, desiring to be witnesses to the truth of the Gospel, intend to live the commitments of their Baptism with the help of a total consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary. To this end, they commit themselves to the perfect practice of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin taught by Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, whom they choose as spiritual Guide and Master.” (Statutes Art. 1)

Further, the Statutes state: “The Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts is open to all the faithful (lay persons, clergy, religious) who desire to engage themselves in the spiritual and apostolic journey proposed by Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort.” (Statutes Art. 8) Therefore: “One who, **after the necessary formation and preparation, pronounces the consecration to Jesus, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, by the hands of Mary, according to the formula of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort**, may be received into the Association. The incorporation is made, following the motivated request of the candidate and **acceptance by the Director**, at the moment when the consecration is made **in the presence of the Director or his delegate** and its inscription in the register of the Association” (Statutes Art. 9).

The Statutes also make clear that one of the commitments of those who become members of the Association is the commitment to collaborate, according to their possibilities and their own condition, in the apostolate of the Company of Mary. Various forms of collaboration are possible, among them: (1) Praying for the Company of Mary, its members and its mission; (2) Actively assisting the Company of Mary in its mission, whether financially or by practical collaboration in its work.

After this survey of Montfortian associations in general, in their origin and development, it will be useful to see how each country has tried to adapt to its own culture, but always in the spirit of the Founder. The article we cited above on *Associations* in the *Handbook of the Spirituality of St Louis Marie de Montfort* (but more particularly in the French version in the *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité montfortaine*) gives some details on this topic. For the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, further details are to be found on the web site of the Montfort Missionaries at <http://www.montfort.org.uk/assocMQOAH.php>, which details the History and Nature of the Association, and how to become a member.

3. Montfortian Secular Institutes

To speak of Montfortian secular institutes is to speak of one concrete realisation of this—in the Montfortian province of Italy—since it seems that at present this is the only example of such an institute that exists. In France there exists a form of the *Association of Mary, Queen of All Hearts* (known commonly as the *Fraternité montfortaine*) that is sometimes designated by the initials ISM, which could be translated as “Institut Séculier Montfortain”, but in fact this group is not a secular institute in the strict canonical sense, even though certain ways of living and speaking may recall the idea of a secular institute. According to Canon 710 of the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, “A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which the Christian faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and seek to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within.” From the other Canons dealing with the topic (Canon 710-730), it is clear that the members of secular institutes are called to “live a life according to the evangelical counsels” (Canon 722, §2) of poverty, obedience and chastity, though in a way that is consistent with their living in the world. Canon 721, §1, 3° states that a married person cannot be admitted to such an institute while the marriage lasts.

The case of the group known as *Missionarie di Maria* (Missionaries of Mary) in Italy is different: it is a diocesan secular institute in the strict sense, with its own structure and governance, even though its origin and mode of action remain profoundly “Montfortian”.

The *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* was rediscovered in 1842 and very quickly spread beyond the confines of France. It seems that the first Italian edition was published in 1851, even though the 1857 edition is the earliest one we now possess. The numerous editions that followed this have known great success.

With regard to Montfortian associates, the earliest documents, preserved in Italy, date back to 16 June 1906. This was the date of the establishment of the first confraternity of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts in Rome, close to the shrine of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts. This place was to become the driving centre of the Montfortian movement, both in Italy and internationally.

The day that was to prove decisive for the rapid spread of *True Devotion* in Italy was when a Papal audience was granted to Fr. Hubert Marie Gebhart, the Procurator General of the Montfort Missionaries. The Holy Father (Pius X) spoke words of approval for the doctrine

taught by Montfort, and accepted to be the first one inscribed in the register of the Association of “Priests of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts.”

Asti, in Piedmont, was the first town to have an organised group of Montfortian associates, established on 29 April 1910. In 1911 there followed the group in Genoa, and on 2 May 1914, there appeared the first issue of *Regina dei cuori*, the official magazine of the Archconfraternity of Mary, Queen of Our Hearts.

Between 1914 and 1943, this magazine played a crucial role as a means of liaison, information and training. In 1946, the magazine acquired a new name: *Madre e Regina*. Over the years, more and more groups came into being: Padua, Casale Monferrato, Reggio Calabria, Templo Pausana, Santa Maria Ligure, Bologna...

In these groups, especially in Reggio Calabria, some members felt called to live their total consecration to Jesus through Mary in a form of consecration by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. So it was that, little by little, a group was formed that is now approved as a *Diocesan Secular Institute*, under the authority of the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Reggio Calabria.

As opposed to the ISM in France, this institute has no juridical dependence on the Company of Mary, even though spiritual bonds and reciprocal service, including in “mission lands”, make this institute a part of the Montfortian Family.

Exercises

1. Why did St. Louis Marie de Montfort become a founder of religious institutes?
2. What elements of his spirituality are particularly manifest in the various parts of the Montfortian Family?
3. What part could you play in the Montfortian Family?

Further Reading

The articles already mentioned in *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort* might well be studied in more depth:

- *Company of Mary* (pgs. 181-198)
- *Daughters of Wisdom* (pgs. 281-298)
- *Brothers of St. Gabriel* (pgs. 117-126)
- *Associations* (pgs. 31-44)

For brief histories of the Company of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom in England, up to 1947, see the commemorative booklet *St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, published in the year of St. Louis Marie’s canonization. It can be downloaded from the Montfort Missionaries’ web site at [http://www.montfort.org.uk/Documents/St Louis Marie de Montfort \(Canonization book\).pdf](http://www.montfort.org.uk/Documents/St_Louis_Marie_de_Montfort_(Canonization_book).pdf), pgs. 67-72 and 73-76.

For the *Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts* see <http://www.montfort.org.uk/assocMQOAH.php> and <http://www.queenofallhearts.org/> in the USA.

Marcel Gendrot, smm

THE MONTFORTIAN FAMILY

¹ Note that the French version of this article in *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité montfortaine* is much longer than its English equivalent (36 pages as opposed to 13), and has more details of Montfortian Associations in various different countries.