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## ST. LOUIS MARY GRIGNION DE MONTFORT AND THE MARIAN CONSECRATION

The purpose of this paper is to present a resumé of Saint Louis de Montfort's explanation of consecration to Mary.<sup>1</sup> To phrase it more precisely, we will attempt an overview of the Marian dimension of the perfect renewal of our baptismal covenant with the Lord as preached by Saint Louis Mary. The importance of

<sup>1</sup> Bibliography on the subject may be found in P. Gaffney, S.M.M., "The Holy Slavery of Love," *Mariology*, ed. Juniper Carol, O.F.M., (3 vols; Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1961), 3: 143-161; P. Sessa, "Nel 250 anniversario della morte di S. Luigi de Montfort (1716-1966)," *Scuola Apostolica*, XCV (gennaio-aprile, 1967): 37-53; G. Besutti, "Bibliografia mariana 1967-1972," *Mm* 35 (1973): 106, 120, 143, 222; cf. also G. Barbera et al., *Dieu Seul*, (Rome: Centre International Montfortain, 1981); Msgr. Ancel, "À la suite de Montfort," *CabM* 17 (janvier, 1973): 49-51; J. Audusseau, S.M.M., "Louis-Marie Grignon," *CabM* 17 (janvier, 1973): 23-28; A. Bossard, S.M.M., "Consécration," *Petit Vocabulaire Marial* (Paris: Cahiers Marials & Desclée de Brouwer, 1979): 51-55; "Présence de Marie au baptême et au baptisé," *CabM* 27 (janvier, 1982): 15-28; "Se consacrer à Marie," *CabM* 28 (avril, 1983): 95-106; R. Cantais, "Enquête sur la consécration mariale," *CabM* 28 (avril, 1983): 85-94; S. De Fiores, S.M.M., "Le Saint Esprit et Marie chez Grignon de Montfort," *CabM* 20 (novembre, 1975): 195-215 and *Itinerario spirituale di S. Luigi Maria di Montfort (1673-1716)*, *MLS* 6 (1974): 3-296; P. Gaffney, S.M.M., *Mary's Spiritual Maternity According to Saint Louis de Montfort*, (Bay Shore, N.Y.: Montfort Publications, 1976) and "Saint Louis de Montfort," *Queen* (July-August, 1981): 29-31, (September-October, 1981): 35-36, (November-December, 1981): 12-13; M. Gilbert, S.J., "L'exégèse spirituelle de Montfort," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 104 (nov.-dec., 1982): 678-691 (English translation, *Queen* 34, nos. 2, 3, 4 [1983] [Bay Shore, N.Y. 11706]); G.M. Ménard, S.J., *La consécration à Marie, Mère de l'Église: aspects nouveaux* (Montréal, Québec: Les Groupes de vie mariale, 1983); L. Perouas, S.M.M., *Ce que croyait Grignon de Montfort et comment il a vécu sa foi* (Paris: Mame, 1973); "Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort [saint], *DSp* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), LXII-LXIII: 1073-1081; J. Seguy, "Charisme, sacerdoce, fondation: autour de L.-M. Grignon de Montfort," *Social Compass*, XXIX (1982): 5-24 and "Millénarisme et 'Ordres adventistes': Grignon de Montfort et les 'Apôtres des Derniers Temps,'" *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 53 (janvier-mars, 1982): 23-48.

the topic is evident, especially in the light of the collegial *Act of Entrusting to Our Lady*<sup>2</sup> pronounced by all the bishops of the Church only two months ago and of the renewed influence of Saint Louis de Montfort within the Christian community.<sup>3</sup>

The paper will be divided into three main sections: I. The Presuppositions Necessary for an Understanding of Montfort's Thought; II. The Theological Foundations of the Marian Consecration; III. The Marian Consecration Itself.

## I

Before attempting an explanation of Montfort's writings<sup>4</sup> on

<sup>2</sup> For the official text, cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, CXXIV (Sabato 18 Febraio, 1984): 1; P. Gaffney, S.M.M., "A Theological Study of the 'Act of Entrusting,'" *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly Edition in English), N. 16 (16 April, 1984): 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> An indication of renewed interest in Saint Louis de Montfort is the fact that the Holy See has received thousands of petitions within the last few years requesting that the missionary be named a Doctor of the Church. Moreover, the devotion of Pope John Paul II to Saint Louis de Montfort and his esteem for the writings of the saint are well known. Concerning Montfort's *True Devotion*, the Holy Father has stated: "La lecture de ce livre a marqué dans ma vie un tournant décisif" (André Frossard, *N'ayez pas peur, dialogues avec Jean-Paul II* [Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1982], 184).

<sup>4</sup> Almost all of the works of the saint can be found in Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966). The *Oeuvres Complètes* contain only excerpts from Montfort's *Livre des Sermons*, now available through the scholarship of Most Reverend Henry Frehen, S.M.M., Bishop of Reykjavik, Iceland (who is the foremost authority on the Montfortian manuscripts): *Le Livre des Sermons du Père de Montfort* (Rome: Centre International Montfortain, 1983); the *Oeuvres Complètes* also lacks the complete *Cahier de Notes* of the missionary, which has yet to be formally published in its entirety. The *Complete Works of Saint Louis de Montfort* are soon to be published in English. The English translations of most of the writings of the saint are available separately through Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, N.Y. In this paper, references to the works of Saint Louis de Montfort will be according to the title of the work and the number of the paragraph; the numbering of the paragraphs has generally become standardized in all editions. Those works which have not yet been published in English will be cited according to the *Oeuvres Complètes*, e.g., *Oeuvres, Cantique* (In citing a *Cantique*, the first number pertains to the hymn itself, the number following the colon, the stanza.).

Marian consecration, there are three basic presuppositions which must be briefly clarified.

### 1. The Importance of Consecration in Montfortian Spirituality.

The goal of this vagabond missionary is not merely *sapere res prout sunt*. Rather, he hopes, with an evangelical idealism characteristic of saints, to proclaim in the power of the Spirit the reform of the Church, the renewal of the face of the earth, so that the reign of Christ may be established.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of his more than 200 missions, of the communities he founded, of his writings, is only understood when considered in the light of his all-consuming zeal for the Kingdom of God. He therefore yearns "to form a disciple of Jesus Christ."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, especially 5, 6, 16, 17; *Oeuvres, Règles des prêtres missionnaires de la compagnie de Marie*, 56; *Secret of Mary*, 59; *True Devotion*, 13, 133, 227, 272.

<sup>6</sup> *True Devotion to Mary*, 111; cf. 59. It should be noted that the manuscript of the *True Devotion* was only discovered in 1842, fulfilling the strange prophecy which the author himself made about the work (Cf. *True Devotion*, 114.). The manuscript is torn and approximately the first ninety pages have never been discovered. Montfort himself refers to a "first part" (Cf. *True Devotion*, 227, 228, 256.) which does not correspond to the present state of the manuscript. The title should be considered a misnomer for there are many forms of true devotion as Montfort himself points out (Cf. *True Devotion*, 91; *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 215.); moreover, the first authentic title of the manuscript in its present form precedes number 120 and is written by the saint in large letters: *The Perfect Consecration to Jesus Christ*. The title which Saint Louis Mary himself gives to the entire work is found in 227: *The Preparation for the Reign of Jesus Christ*. Most modern editions now include this title with the traditional one, *The True Devotion to Mary*. For the saint's thoughts on Our Lady, this work, containing his general teaching on the Mother of God, is the most important, provided it is put in the context of the broad outline of his spirituality, *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*. *The Secret of Mary* (The original manuscript is lost.) is a "letter of spiritual direction," probably to a religious, and therefore seems to presuppose clarifications the saint would give either personally or by letter. *The Admirable Secret of the Most Holy Rosary* is, for the most part, a collection of excerpts from the writings of Antonin Thomas, O.P., and other authors who probably all have as their primary source, Alain de la Roche, O.P. Montfort's book on the rosary is the least "personal" of all his works and is probably intended to be primarily a handbook for his community of missionaries, as an aid in preaching the rosary.

In fact, Montfort firmly believes that he is called by God to form not only "a great squadron of valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, a squadron of men and women to combat the world"<sup>7</sup> but also "the true apostles of the latter times."<sup>8</sup> Although this urgent call is directed primarily to priests, it must not be overlooked that his plea is universal: men and women of all ages, of all places, are to become the dynamic apostles of Jesus Christ; in

<sup>7</sup> *True Devotion*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> *True Devotion*, 58, cf. 23-27; cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, passim; *The Secret of Mary*, 59. J. Seguy, in "Millénarisme," 26-27, states that Montfort speaks of the "reign of Jesus Christ" as "placé entre la Grande Tribulation et le retour personnel du Christ pour le Jugement. En un sens, on a affaire ici à un post-millénarisme, mais . . . ce "règne" est, en fait, une version mariale du Troisième Âge joachimiste." There is no doubt that Saint Louis Mary shows great interest in a future renewal of the Church which will be brought about when Jesus is fully known and served; and this demands a practical recognition of Mary's role. This does appear to be distinct from the parousia itself which will also be through Mary, as was his first coming. However, to speak of this as reflecting a type of millenarianism of Joachim of Floris—in spite of the evident borrowing of terminology via Marie des Vallées (Cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, 16.)—seems to extend the term "millenarianism" beyond its ordinary connotation and therefore is not apt to describe the missionary's conviction that the Church can only, and one day will, triumph over her enemies when Mary is fully known. It appears that Montfort refers to a new depth of renewal of the Church which will take place at some unknown future time through these *apostles of the latter times* (Montfort considers his missionary community the core of this group.) and which will hasten the second coming of the Lord. (Cf. H. Frehen, "Le 'second avènement' de Jésus Christ et la 'méthode' de saint Louis-Marie de Montfort" in *Documentation montfortaine*, 31 [Rome: Centre International Montfortain, 1962]: 98-108.) It appears to be stretching the point somewhat to speak of "un triomphe terrestre de l'Église (le 'règne de Jésus-Christ') d'une durée indéterminée, entre la fin du temps de l'Église et la parousie" even though Seguy does modify this "millenarianism" by speaking of it as "un temps de triomphe pour Dieu et son Église qui se déroule sur terre visiblement—et pas seulement à l'intérieur des âmes—, mais qui n'implique pas—explicitement au moins—changements de type écologique, économique, politique, ni pour ses participants, un bonheur de type 'matériel' " (Seguy, "Millénarisme," 45, note 66; 47, note 93). The missionary does, however, declare that even the Scriptures are "highly obscure" on this point of the second coming of the Lord, and Montfort remains firmly entrenched within this evangelical obscurity. (Cf. *The Secret of Mary*, 58; *True Devotion*, 59.)

the power of the Spirit they will reform the Church and renew the face of the earth.<sup>9</sup>

It is only in this apostolic context that Montfort's teachings on consecration itself can be studied. For if an army of men and women is to be formed who will be the instruments of the Spirit in renewing this earth in Jesus Christ for the glory of the Father, then there must be an on-going *interior* renewal<sup>10</sup> of each person in this squadron. A dynamic change, a deep transformation must be part of the training of all, but especially of these "true apostles of the latter times."<sup>11</sup> To put it in other terms, consecration, the lived-out baptismal covenant renewal, is the principal means he proposes for the formation of apostles of Jesus Christ; it is also the means they will use to bring about this "reform" of the Church, this "renewal" of the universe.

Through this consecration, Christians will share in the faith of Mary and therefore will possess, St. Louis Mary tells them,

. . . a courageous faith, which will enable you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and for the salvation of souls . . . which you will use to enlighten those who are in the darkness of the shadow of death, to inflame those who are lukewarm and who have need of the heated gold of charity, to give life to those who are dead in sin, to touch and overthrow, by your meek and powerful words, the hearts of marble and the cedars of Lebanon, and finally, to resist the devil and all the enemies of salvation.<sup>12</sup>

Consecration (*le contrat d'alliance*)<sup>13</sup> is central, then, in the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, 17; *True Devotion*, 43 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 119.

<sup>11</sup> *True Devotion*, 58; cf. *Prayer for Missionaries*, 7-25.

<sup>12</sup> *True Devotion*, 214.

<sup>13</sup> This "covenant contract with God" is one of Montfort's expressions for the consecration or the renewal of the baptismal vows. As his first biographer, Grandet, tells us, the missions preached by the saint had as their goal "renouveler l'esprit du christianisme par le renouvellement des promesses du baptême" (J. Grandet, p.s.s., *La vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, prêtre, missionnaire apostolique, composé par un prêtre du Clergé* [Nantes: Verger, 1724], 101). Grandet also tells us that the missionary would hand out printed formulas of this baptismal renewal, having those sign them who knew how to write (Cf. Grandet, *La vie*, 395.). These formulas were often entitled *Contrat d'alliance avec Dieu, vœux ou promesses du S. Baptême*. (Cf. *Oeuvres, Le Contrat d'Alliance avec Dieu*, 824-827.)

life, teaching and preaching of Saint Louis de Montfort. Like a new Elijah, he cries out with an end-time urgency for a continual new depth of our lived-out acceptance of that covenant which God has made with us in Jesus. In the final analysis, this is his overarching goal: an army of apostolic men and women who truly live the utter existential poverty (*kenosis*) of total consecration and therefore, rich with the Spirit (*theosis*), "perform great wonders in the world in order to destroy sin and establish the reign of Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Consecration Envisaged by Montfort as Clearly Trinitarian/Christocentric.

In the eyes of this missionary, there is no such thing as consecration to Mary, period; this would be equivalent to a diabolical illusion.<sup>15</sup> The term "Marian consecration" must always be understood in the context which is essential for Montfort: consecration to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. It is one of the ironies of history that the Jansenists of his age were the occasion for some of his most beautiful sections on the centrality of Jesus, the Wisdom of the Father.<sup>16</sup>

Probably because of the critical age in which he exercised his priestly ministry and the Jansenistic opposition he encountered, Saint Louis goes to extremes to stress that Mary of herself is absolutely nothing.<sup>17</sup> Although opposed to Widenfeld's theses,<sup>18</sup> he seems to have been affected by them in this sense: he repeatedly accentuates the Christocentric/Trinitarian goal of consecration.

<sup>14</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 59. The *True Devotion* was written explicitly to bring about the "reign of Jesus Christ" (227).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 60-67. One of the distinguishing traits of Montfortian spirituality is its centrality on Jesus as the *Wisdom* of the Father, the theme of Saint Louis Mary's first work, *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 14, 62, 63.

<sup>18</sup> [A. Widenfeld], *Monita salutaria B.V. Mariae ad cultores suos indiscretos* (Gandavi: D'Erckel, 1673). Cf. Montfort's condemnation of external and presumptuous devotees of Mary, *True Devotion*, 96-97. Cf. P. Hoffer, *La dévotion à Marie au déclin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Autour du Jansénisme et des "Avis Salutaires de la B.V. Marie à ses Dévots indiscrets"* (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

Consecration, strictly so called, is for this missionary an act of *latría*.<sup>19</sup> Marian consecration envisages Our Lady as the way, the means to the Lord.<sup>20</sup> Her beauty is found in the gratuitous gift of grace so lavished upon her by the Triune God, so that the only thing she can do is to center us on Christ: this is her Spirit-filled personality. Mary is then for Montfort, “altogether relative to God,” she is the “echo”<sup>21</sup> of God, she is “nothing at all.”<sup>22</sup> The writings of Montfort stress the centrality of Christ, the power of the Spirit, the glory of the Father.

The first fundamental truth of all devotion to Mary—that Jesus Christ is the final goal of all our devotion—is typical of Montfort’s thought. As he says in the opening paragraph of this first truth:

Jesus Christ, Our Savior, true God and true Man, must be the final goal of all our other devotions, else they are false and delusive.<sup>23</sup>

To take Mary out of this essential Trinitarian/Christological context is, for Montfort, nothing short of blasphemous. It is her glory that she is but a relationship to the Wisdom of the Father; her entire existence is only for the Lord. She lives the fulness of reality: we are the Lord’s.<sup>24</sup> It is only in this Trinitarian/Christological context that the Montfortian Marian consecration can be understood.

### 3. The Works of Saint Louis de Montfort Only Correctly Understood within Their Historical Context.

Surely this can be said for any piece of literature but there are some unique aspects of Montfort’s historical context which make

<sup>19</sup> The Act of Consecration, which Montfort equates with the renewal of baptism itself, is found in *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom* and is directed to “Jesus Christ, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom.” Repeatedly, Montfort insists on “God Alone” (his motto) being the final end of all devotion to Mary. (Cf. *True Devotion*, 61, 62, 94, 120, 125, 127, 225, 245, etc.)

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 60, 61, 245.

<sup>21</sup> *True Devotion*, 225.

<sup>22</sup> *True Devotion*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *True Devotion*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 3:23.



the task of situating this missionary especially arduous.

First of all, the *personal* world of this saint is marked by a profoundly mystical, intimate union with Jesus and Mary. Of his short sixteen years of priesthood, at least a total of four were spent in contemplative solitude. Like all mystical authors, he is caught up in the "alienation of language," the impossibility of human expressions to convey the deep truths he experiences. His writings are marked by an evident struggle to express, in the analogies of his time, the inexpressible. His works are, therefore, primarily *proclamations* of these truths, where he gives witness, testimony, to the beauty and power of Jesus and Mary. The fundamental theological underpinnings are there, but since he never intends to write a manual of theology, they are not always explicitly evident. Pope John Paul II who admits that his life reached a definitive turning point through the writings of Saint Louis Mary, speaks of them as "baroque" in style<sup>25</sup> and they are surely marked by the flowery language of the age of Louis XIV. But the difficulty goes beyond the style. Montfort is not a professional theologian; he is not a university professor: he is a contemplative, vagabond missionary and his writings must be understood in this light.

To be more precise, Montfort cannot be pigeon-holed. He defies strict classification. He can be depicted as proclaiming the word with the power of the Spirit in barracks, pulpits, houses of prostitution, town-squares, contemplative monasteries, village chapels; or searching the gutters for the numerous neglected sick and poor; or lost in contemplative prayer in his hideout cave in the forests of Mervent; or teaching catechism to children by putting on a play in the village church; or as the live-in, highly-organized chaplain of the immense poor-house in Paris, *La Salpêtrière*; or walking with uncovered head through the countryside from one village to another, whittling statues of Our Lady, singing his own rather homey but theological hymns, (totalling 20,000 verses!). Enjoying the distinguished title, *Apostolic Missionary*, granted by Pope Clement XI himself, he is without a residence, without a specific diocese or bishop, a ragged vaga-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. A. Frossard, *N'ayez pas peur*, 186.

bond carrying all his belongings—the Bible, the breviary, his notebook of sermon outlines—in a knapsack strung over his shoulder. Truly a powerful and intriguing figure in the history of the Church.<sup>26</sup>

The second difficulty in reading Montfort is what could be termed the world of *his time*. He is from the small village of Montfort in the West of France, living during the age of pompous royalty. His language, replete with “Oh!’s” and outbursts of direct address to God, to Mary, and also to his hearers; his spontaneous references to Turks, slaves, squadrons, wet-hens, wormy-apples, dead dogs, pirates, corsairs, dung-heaps, royal courts, churches neglected by their non-ordained abbés who openly flirt with the women of the congregation,<sup>27</sup> monarchs and sovereigns, poor-houses—all reflect his world which is quite alien to ours. Moreover, he preached at a time when devotion to Our Lady was apparently becoming more and more neglected if not even openly repudiated by some theologians and he clearly reacts to them, at times with dismay, at times with downright anger.<sup>28</sup> Theologically also he is, of course, a man of his times expressing, for example, the ecclesiology, the scriptural exegesis, the Alexandrian Christology, of his age, not ours. In fact, this is one of the reasons why he is so successful a preacher: he truly speaks from and to the culture of *his* age. It is also a reason why his writings are not so easily understood today.

<sup>26</sup> One of the most important insights into Saint Louis de Montfort is the biography—more the memoirs—written by his close friend Jean-Baptiste Blain (*Lettre de Monsieur XX à . . . qui contient l’abrégé de la vie de Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, missionnaire apostolique mort en odeur de sainteté en Poitou le 28 avril 1716* [Rome: Centre International Montfortain, 1973]). One of the earliest biographies of Montfort is also of great importance in any study of the person of Montfort: C. Besnard, *Vie de M. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, now published in two volumes by the Centre International Montfortain (Rome, 1981). Of the recent biographies of the saint, one of the more important is B. Papisogli, *Montfort, Un uomo per l’ultima Chiesa* (Torino: Grignaudi, 1979). For a bibliography of the principal biographies of Montfort and also of works dealing with the spiritual climate of his time, cf. De Fiores, *Itinerario*, 7-11.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 136:9-11.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 64, 93.

In a certain sense, he too lives "on the boundary," caught between two poles of so many worlds. He yearns to be a missionary but also a contemplative. He is strongly influenced by the baroque and strongly *Marian* age of the 17th century but encounters the *critical* age of the 18th, when France was beginning to move from Bossuet to Voltaire. He is raised by a strict father, by a kind mother.<sup>29</sup> He has an intellectually sharp mind and is an avid and generally critical reader, yet speaks in the concrete language of the popular piety of the day. He stresses devotion to Mary, yet sees some truth in the criticisms levelled by the Jansenists in their opposition to it. He is boldly innovative, to a point that he is expelled at least five times from various dioceses, yet he—although with difficulty—remains obedient. He loves the church as the Body of Christ, and is, therefore, impelled to speak against the abuses which are within the very sanctuary itself. He is caught between the Sulpician mystical-apostolic spirit of Olier and Bayün and the more "prim and proper" trend which has also penetrated St. Sulpice through Olier's successors, Tronson and Lechassier.<sup>30</sup> His unwavering fidelity to the teachings of the Holy Father<sup>31</sup> is in marked contrast to the Gallicanism of his day. Convinced of God's tenderness and love,<sup>32</sup> he is also taken up with His justice and biblical wrath.<sup>33</sup> Loved intensely by the poor and simple-folk, several times his enemies try to assassinate him. Finally, he is influenced directly or indirectly by such diverse currents of thought: by Bérulle and the French School; by the spirituality of the Sulpicians; by the myriad elements of the spirituality of the Jesuits, especially of the West of

<sup>29</sup> The effects of Montfort's home life upon his temperament have come under scrutiny especially by Pérouas, *Ce que croyait*; to a lesser degree by De Fiores, *Itinerario* (Cf., e.g., 74-79.). As insightful as these studies are into the character of the saint, it must be remembered that they are based upon probable interpretations of facts and also upon a particular school of psychological thought.

<sup>30</sup> On Montfort's relations with the Sulpicians, cf., especially De Fiores, *Itinerario*, 184-200; 223-248.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 147:3; 6:57.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 117-132; cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 57 to 66.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Secret of Mary*, 66; *True Devotion*, 52, 172, 241, 248; *Oeuvres, Cantique* 88:12.

France; by the Dominicans, by Thomistic thought; by Henry Suso and Alain de la Roche; by St. Francis de Sales and his Visitation Nuns, especially those at Paray-le-Monial. Primarily through authors of his time, he comes in contact with the Fathers of the Church; through the writings of St. Jean Eudes and his dirigée, the enigmatic Marie des Vallées, Montfort has some acquaintance with the mystics of the north like St. Hildegarde and St. Bridget of Sweden. Truly an eclectic background.

After his pilgrimage on foot<sup>34</sup> to Rome to seek the advice of Clement XI, there is a certain peace which this young priest enjoys: he lives as a vagabond missionary, for "God Alone," and is generally utterly carefree of what the world thinks, since he is so entrusted to Divine Providence.

If we have been somewhat lengthy in describing these presuppositions of our study of Montfort's Marian consecration, it is because they form essential hermeneutical tools in uncovering the authentic thought of this towering character of the Church at the very beginning of the 18th century.

## II

In order to survey Saint Louis de Montfort's theological foundations on the Marian dimension of covenant renewal, there are two principal points of his teachings which must be reviewed: *first*, the Marian model the saint employs in his writings on consecration; *secondly*, the anthropological model he stresses, which shows man's need for Marian consecration. Only then can we consider the third section, the consecration itself. The first two steps, the Marian and anthropological models, may be termed the foundations of the *Marian consecration* which, in turn, may be called the response to Montfort's understanding of Mary and of humankind.

<sup>34</sup> Biographers gauge that Montfort *walked* several thousand miles on his various apostolic journeys. The only time it is known that he travelled on horseback was when, expelled from one diocese before he could offer Mass on the feast of the Assumption, he hastened to a neighboring diocese in order to celebrate the liturgy.

A. The Marian Model Employed by Montfort.

We will summarize the Marian model in the following five statements:

1. God freely wills Mary as uniquely necessary in the present order of salvation.

This thesis should be prefaced by stating that Saint Louis de Montfort is no Scotist when it comes to the motive of the Incarnation.<sup>35</sup> His training by the Jesuits and the Sulpicians was strongly Thomistic. He sees this universe embroiled in sin and, because of sin, the Incarnation is to take place. Created in original justice, and therefore reflecting Divine Wisdom, man sins against the Creator and:

In this state Adam is, as it were, without hope. Neither the Angels nor any other creature can save him . . . he sees heaven closed and no one to open it. He sees hell open and no one to close it.<sup>36</sup>

The missionary now truly dramatizes the situation:

It seems to me that this amiable Princess [*i.e.*, *Wisdom, a feminine noun in French*] now calls to council for a second time the Blessed Trinity for man's restoration as she had already done for his creation. In this grand council there seems to be taking place a kind of contest between Eternal Wisdom and the justice of God. I seem to hear eternal Wisdom pleading the cause of man and saying that on account of his sin, he and his descendants rightly deserve to be damned for all eternity with the rebel angels but that mercy should be shown to him because he sinned by weakness and ignorance rather than malice. . . . Eternal Wisdom, seeing that there is nothing in the whole of creation capable of atoning for the sin of man, of satisfying divine justice and appeasing the wrath of God and nevertheless wishing to save man whom she loves, Herself finds an admirable means of doing so. Drawn by an unheard of and incom-

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 109:3.

<sup>36</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 40.

prehensible excess of love, this lovable and sovereign Princess offers Herself in sacrifice to Her Father in order to satisfy Divine Justice, to calm Divine anger, to redeem us from the slavery of the devil and the flames of hell and to merit for us eternal happiness. Her offer is accepted. A decision is reached and adopted: Eternal Wisdom, or the Son of God, will become man at the appropriate time and in preordained circumstances.<sup>37</sup>

It is only against this backdrop that we understand the first of the theses of the Marian foundation of consecration: God freely wills Mary as uniquely necessary in the present order of salvation. Three points to clarify this first thesis:

a) Mary is, first of all, *hypothetically necessary*, which means that:

The grand Lord, always independent and sufficient to Himself, never had and has not now any absolute need of the Holy Virgin for the accomplishment of His will and for the manifestation of His glory. He has but to will in order to do everything.<sup>38</sup>

“He chose to make use of Our Blessed Lady though He had no absolute need of her.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, in His freedom which is his very being, He wills our redemption in the Incarnate Wisdom and as an integral component of this decree is found a woman of our race, Mary. God is the one who freely makes Mary necessary. Speaking explicitly about the Incarnate Wisdom’s choice of Mary, Montfort exclaims “Oh, admirable and incomprehensible dependence of God. . . .”<sup>40</sup> She is, therefore, “necessary to God by a necessity which we call hypothetical, in consequence of His will.”<sup>41</sup> If anyone would ask this missionary why there is a necessary Marian dimension to baptismal renewal, why there is a necessary Marian dimension to salvation history, his

<sup>37</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 42-46.

<sup>38</sup> *True Devotion*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> *True Devotion*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *True Devotion*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> *True Devotion*, 39.

answer would be a simple: the evident will of God. Basing himself especially on the annunciation narrative (Lk 1:26-38) and also on the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) and the Wisdom literature (especially Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom) as prayed, taught and lived within the Church, Montfort founds the role of Mary on the solid rock of the will of God.

To state otherwise would be, in Montfort's eyes, to tear pages out of the Scriptures, to reject the teachings of the Church, the Body of Christ, to accept only those aspects of salvation history which please us, to concoct a dream-world.

b) The second point of clarification of this first thesis is that Montfort insists on "the present order of salvation." Saint Louis Mary is not really interested in any *possible* orders of salvation; he is not interested in a make-believe history of mankind. He stresses "things being as they are" and this brings out a certain pragmatic side of Montfort. He cannot get embroiled in theological controversies which appear to escape the reality of the present situation. And the present situation demands—by the free will of God—the participation of Mary. For Montfort, whether we like it or not, she is there. To say otherwise is to live in the unreal, it is definitely to be outside of Christianity, to be outside of the scriptures. Baptismal renewal must, therefore, take into account Mary's presence.

c) The third element of this first thesis of Montfort is that salvation history is "one." Whether we want to speak of salvation *in actu primo* and *in actu secundo*, whether we want to speak of the objective and subjective redemption, in Montfort's eyes, they are but phases at best of *one* plan of salvation history. "God having willed to commence his works by Mary," says Montfort—and therefore concludes that all salvation history bears this imprint of Mary's cooperation.<sup>42</sup> It is incomprehensible for Montfort to say that Mary was necessary in the objective redemption but then discarded in the subjective. Rightfully, the two form but one history of salvation. This will become clearer when we examine Montfort's thought concerning the Incarnation.

<sup>42</sup> *True Devotion*, 15; cf. also 1.

2. The ultimate reason for willing Mary as integral in salvation history is the Divine Maternity: Mary, the faith-filled Mother/Associate of the Redeemer.

In order better to understand this second thesis of Montfort's foundation of Marian consecration, we can divide it into the following three points:

a) The Divine Maternity is the Prime Principle of Montfort's Mariology.<sup>43</sup> The fundamental role of Mary in salvation history is to be the Mother of God and for Montfort this means also, as we will see, the Associate of the Redeemer. His stress on the Incarnation as the abridgement of all mysteries, leads him to speak of "the incomparable graces God has given to Mary and particularly for having chosen her to be His Most Holy Mother."<sup>44</sup> And even more clearly, in one of his hymns, written not for the rhyme but for the catechetical teaching:

She is the Mother of Jesus: we cannot say anything greater of her. This is the victory of victories, the crown of crowns. Let all mortals intone, in heaven, on earth and in all places: Mary is the Mother of God, she is the Mother of Jesus: we cannot say anything greater of her.<sup>45</sup>

Her special role in the plan of salvation history is clear: "Divine Wisdom would become man, provided that she [Mary] would give her consent"<sup>46</sup> to be his Mother.

b) The second element of this second thesis of Montfort is an insistence on the *permanent* relationships which the Divine Maternity causes between Mary and the Persons of the Trinity.<sup>47</sup> — Mary is forever the Mother of Jesus, and Jesus, forever the fruit of her womb: this theme is found interlaced throughout the writings of Montfort: "Jesus being at present as much as ever

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gaffney, *Spiritual Maternity*, 21-25.

<sup>44</sup> *True Devotion*, 243.

<sup>45</sup> *Oeuvres, Cantique* 88:20.

<sup>46</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 107; cf. *True Devotion*, 16, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 42; *True Devotion*, 5, 14-39, 140.



the fruit of Mary. . . ."<sup>48</sup> Whenever we find Jesus, he is always the Son of Mary. She is always, concludes Montfort, "the inseparable companion of His [Jesus'] life, of His death, of His glory and of His power in heaven and upon earth."<sup>49</sup>

—Mary is also, therefore, always the Spouse of the Holy Spirit:

. . . his indissoluble Spouse. . . . The Holy Spirit chose to make use of Our Blessed Lady though he had no absolute need of her, to bring His fruitfulness into action by producing in her and by her Jesus Christ and His members—a mystery of grace unknown to even the wisest and most spiritual of Christians.<sup>50</sup>

—She is forever, therefore, the Daughter of God the Father, for having willed to "communicate to Mary His fruitfulness inasmuch as a mere creature was capable of it, in order that He might give her the power to produce His Son," then she also forever is given the power—freely willed by the Father—to produce "the members of His mystical Body."<sup>51</sup> As he says even more explicitly, "God the Father wishes to have children by Mary till the consummation of the world,"<sup>52</sup> for if we do not have Mary for Mother, then we simply do not have God for Father, so indissolubly are they united in the plan of salvation.<sup>53</sup> Again, this is the free will of the Father who lovingly deigns to bring into the very core of salvation history a woman of our race.

c) There is a final element of this second thesis which is of paramount importance in understanding Montfort's thought concerning her divinely willed role in salvation history: she is the woman who *consents* in faith to the Incarnation of Eternal Wisdom. A

<sup>48</sup> *True Devotion*, 33.

<sup>49</sup> *True Devotion*, 74; cf. 224; *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 204.

<sup>50</sup> *True Devotion*, 21. Montfort frequently calls Mary "Spouse of the Holy Spirit." In the *True Devotion*, alone, it is found in numbers 4, 5, 20, 21, 25, 34, 36, 37, 49, 152, 164, 213, 217, 269. Although not employed by the Second Vatican Council, the expression has been used several times by Pope John Paul II. Cf. S. De Fiores, S.M.M., "Le Saint Esprit et Marie chez Grignion de Montfort" in *CahM* 4 (septembre, 1975): 195-215.

<sup>51</sup> *True Devotion*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> *True Devotion*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 30.

perusal of Montfort's writings shows his great insistence upon the mystery of the Incarnation and Mary's role in this compendium of all mysteries:<sup>54</sup> the woman of faith who in the name of all humanity consents to the inbreaking of God's Wisdom into the foolishness of this world. It is this consent which is for Montfort the link which binds together Divine Maternity and Companion of the Redeemer and also Divine Maternity and Spiritual Maternity.

This consent of Mary must be seen, first of all, in the context of Montfort's thought concerning the Incarnation: "It is in this mystery that He has wrought all the other mysteries and contains the will and grace of all."<sup>55</sup> For Montfort, this beginning of our redemption, the Incarnation of Eternal Wisdom, is not just the first point of a series of further moments in time. Rather, it contains what follows and it is the never-repealed law which governs everything in salvation history. The beginning, the Incarnation, transcends and in fact makes immanent all the mysteries which flow from it and, therefore, differs from the other mysteries not just chronologically—it is the first—but qualitatively—it contains them and is the eternal model which governs all which flows from it. Stressing the Incarnation narratives and Hebrews 10:8-9: "When he said above, 'Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' [these are offered according to the law], then he added, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will,'"<sup>56</sup> Montfort insists that the Incarnation is definitely redemptive not only because Jesus is of his very Person our Redemption,<sup>57</sup> but also because it contains all His saving mysteries by the acceptance He makes of them.<sup>58</sup> Montfort can, therefore, say that we have been redeemed by the "Hail Mary."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 203, 204, 208; *Secret of Mary*, 13; *True Devotion*, 6, 31, 204; *Oeuvres, Cantique* 57:6, 87, 109:3-6, 124:8.

<sup>55</sup> *True Devotion*, 248.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 16; *True Devotion*, 248; *Oeuvres, Cantique* 41:3.

<sup>57</sup> *Passim*; cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 45, 46, 104; *True Devotion*, 61, 85; *Friends of the Cross*, 7; *Oeuvres, Cantique* 27:5-9.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 41:3-5; *True Devotion*, 248.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 89:6; *True Devotion*, 250.

It is in this light that we must consider Montfort's insistence on Mary's consent to the Incarnation. She is inextricably and intimately involved in this root, this beginning, this compendium of all the mysteries of the Incarnate Wisdom; she is, therefore, reasons the missionary, involved in the same way in everything which flows from the Incarnation. All salvation history is for Montfort qualified by the consent of Mary. To hold otherwise is to live in that dream-world of some other plan of redemption.

This fundamental teaching of Montfort is the reason for such statements as "He began his miracles by Mary, he will continue them to the end of the ages by Mary."<sup>60</sup>

God having willed to commence and to complete His greatest works by the Most Holy Virgin ever since He created her, we may well think that He will not change his conduct in the eternal ages.<sup>61</sup>

And, as the opening sentence of the present text of the *True Devotion* manuscript states,

It is through the most Holy Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world and it is also through her that He has to reign in the world.<sup>62</sup>

And, in a summary statement of the *True Devotion*,

The conduct which the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity have deigned to pursue in the Incarnation and the first coming of Jesus Christ, they still pursue daily, in an invisible manner, throughout the whole Church and they will pursue it even to the consummation of ages in the last coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup>

The fundamental link in this theological reasoning process is the nature of Mary's consent to the compendium of all mysteries, the Incarnation.

<sup>60</sup> *True Devotion*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> *True Devotion*, 14.

<sup>62</sup> *True Devotion*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *True Devotion*, 22.

Montfort, “speaking particularly to the poor and simple who being of good will and having more faith than the common run of scholars believe more simply and more meritoriously,” contents himself “with stating the truth quite plainly.”<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, he does indicate the essential qualities of this consent of Mary which are so important in trying to grasp his thought.

— The consent of Mary to the redemptive Incarnation is, first of all, *necessary* because of God’s plan, as was seen above. Mary’s *fiat* enters necessarily into the Incarnation and for Montfort, therefore, enters into all which flows from it—the life, death, resurrection of the Lord, the sending of the Spirit, the Church, grace, the sacraments, the Eucharist: all of salvation history. “The Eternal Wisdom desired to become man in her, provided that she give her consent,” a faith-consent which “the Blessed Trinity awaits.”<sup>65</sup> For Montfort, the objective—and therefore the subjective—redemption is governed, is “enclosed” by the identical antiphon of Mary’s *fiat* at the Incarnation and at the victorious Cross:

He [the Redeemer] glorified his independence and His majesty in depending on that sweet Virgin in His Conception . . . and even in His death where she was to be present in order that He might make with her but one same sacrifice and be immolated to the Eternal Father by her consent. . . . it is she who nourished Him, supported Him, brought Him up and then sacrificed Him for us.<sup>66</sup>

Placed in context, Montfort is referring to the fact that God wills this consent of Mary in every aspect of salvation history, even on Calvary, for He has willed it in its beginning, in its seed, in its compendium, the redemptive Incarnation.<sup>67</sup>

— Secondly, it is a *representative* consent. It is given by Mary as the corporate personality of this humanity, or as Montfort speaks, of this universe, yearning for salvation. Mary finds grace

<sup>64</sup> *True Devotion*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 107.

<sup>66</sup> *True Devotion*, 18; cf. 260; *Friends of the Cross*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 35.

“for the entire human race.”<sup>68</sup> Through her consent, she “sacrifices Him . . . for us.”<sup>69</sup> She is humankind’s representative, for this consent of Mary is one which “the entire universe was awaiting for so many centuries.”<sup>70</sup> “She has found grace,” he tells us, “for herself and for each person individually,”<sup>71</sup> and as he expresses it even more forcefully: “she has found grace before God for the whole world in general and for each one in particular.”<sup>72</sup> And again: “The world being unworthy to receive him . . . the Father gave Him to Mary so that the world may receive Him by her. The Son of God became man for our salvation but in Mary and through Mary. God the Holy Spirit formed Jesus Christ in Mary but after having requested her consent.”<sup>73</sup> “If He is the Savior of the world,” sings Montfort, “it is by her virginity, by her humility.”<sup>74</sup> Mary’s faith-consent is a community consent, a surrender of this universe to Wisdom’s desire to be truly “for Man.”<sup>75</sup>

— The third element of this consent is that it is *efficacious*, i.e., salvific. It is a consent willed by God to the redemptive Incarnation, a loving surrender given in the name of the universe for the salvation of men. Saint Louis de Montfort insists that Mary definitely is cognizant of her role at the Incarnation: she is consenting to be the Mother of the Redeemer, the inbreaking of salvation. Her consent, therefore, is directed towards the salvation of mankind. He is the savior of the world, Montfort preaches, because of her humility, i.e., her consent.<sup>76</sup> “It is through Mary that the salvation of the world was begun. . . .”<sup>77</sup>

— Finally, this consent to the redemptive Incarnation is for Montfort, as we have already seen, *eternal*. This is salvation his-

<sup>68</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 56; *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 203.

<sup>69</sup> *True Devotion*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, 107.

<sup>71</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> *True Devotion*, 164.

<sup>73</sup> *True Devotion*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> *Oeuvres, Cantique* 104:15; cf. 90:52.

<sup>75</sup> *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, 64: “Wisdom is for man, and man is for Wisdom.”

<sup>76</sup> *Oeuvres, Cantique* 104:15.

<sup>77</sup> *True Devotion*, 49.

tory: Mary willed by God to be the faithful virgin saying *Yes* to God's plan in the name of the universe. She is the inseparable companion of Jesus; she is the indissoluble spouse of the Spirit; she is forever the Daughter of the Father. She is forever the *Yes* of the human race, forever then by her consent the companion of the Redeemer in *all* his works of grace.<sup>78</sup> As salvation history unfolds in our own lives, in the life of the community, there is always for Montfort, this necessary element, willed by God: the *fiat*, the faith of this woman.

3. Because of God's free choice of Mary as Mother / Associate of Eternal Wisdom, He efficaciously wills Mary to enter freely into a union with Him to a degree unexcelled by any other pure creature.

To put it more concisely, Mary is the storehouse, the aqueduct of grace. Two points are being underlined here: Mary herself is so transformed by grace that she cannot be comprehended by man; secondly, Mary is the storehouse, the aqueduct of grace for us.

a) Mary, a pure creature, is so transformed by grace that Montfort says, "Here let every tongue be mute."<sup>79</sup> He does, however, express his amazement at her union with God by exclaiming:

She is the terrestrial paradise of the New Adam where He was made flesh by the operation of the Holy Spirit in order to work there incomprehensible marvels. She is the grand and divine world of God where there are beauties and treasures unspeakable. She is the magnificence of the Most High where He hid as in her bosom His only Son and in Him all that is most excellent and most precious . . . O height incomprehensible! O breadth unspeakable! O length immeasurable! O abyss impenetrable!<sup>80</sup>

She is utterly transparent of God, so transformed by grace that it would be easier to separate light from the sun, heat from fire<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *True Devotion*, 74, 36.

<sup>79</sup> *True Devotion*, 112.

<sup>80</sup> *True Devotion*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *True Devotion*, 63.

than to separate Mary from her Divine Son. Through God's mysterious choice empowering her to consent freely to His Will, she is "the miracle of miracles of grace, of nature and of glory."<sup>82</sup>

b) Montfort, who thinks in dynamic, practical terms, declares that Mary is filled with God's life in order to share this life with others:

God the Son communicated to His Mother all that He acquired by His life and His death, His infinite merits and His admirable virtues and He has made her the treasurer of all that His Father gave Him for His inheritance. It is by her that He applies His merits to His members. . . . She is His mysterious canal, she is His aqueduct through which He makes His mercies flow gently and abundantly.<sup>83</sup>

She is the treasurer and universal dispenser of the merits and virtues of her Son which she gives and communicates to whom she wills, when she wills, as she wills and in such quantity as she wills.<sup>84</sup>

She is the immense ocean of all the grandeurs of God, the great storehouse of all his goods, the inexhaustible treasure of the Lord and the treasurer and Dispenser of all His gifts. . . . He gives no celestial gift to this earth without having it pass by her as by a canal. It is of her fullness that we have all received.<sup>85</sup>

She gives her whole self, in an unspeakable manner to him who gives all to her. She causes him to be engulfed in the abyss of her graces.<sup>86</sup>

If we pierce through the imagery which Montfort borrowed from the medieval theologians and the concrete language of the popular piety of the era, it appears that the missionary is describing Mary's mysterious and efficacious role in the redemptive Incarnation with its conclusion that the gift of God's life is always united to her eternal *fiat* in the name of this universe. Therefore the redemption, in all its phases, bears the imprint of her myste-

<sup>82</sup> *True Devotion*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> *True Devotion*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> *True Devotion*, 206.

<sup>85</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 207; cf. *Secret of Mary*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> *True Devotion*, 144.

rious cooperation which continues for all eternity. In the concrete terms of popular piety, she is the “canal,” the “aqueduct,” the “treasury,”<sup>87</sup> the “Mother of grace”<sup>88</sup> for the maternal power of her faith-consent to Jesus, Grace Itself, permeates every facet of salvation history.

All of our perfection, Montfort insists, centers on finding the grace of Jesus Christ<sup>89</sup>; Mary is, through God’s mysterious wisdom, through her divinely-willed consent to the redemptive Incarnation, the “store,” the “dispenser” of Grace itself. Moreover, her presence in heaven is a continual prayer for her children so that they may be filled with the life of God. The missionary, although using popular terminology, makes sure his readers correctly understand the meaning of this point:

Jesus has retained the obedience and submission of the most perfect Child toward the best of all mothers. But we must take great pains not to conceive this dependence as any abasement or imperfection in Jesus Christ. For Mary is infinitely below her Son, Who is God, and therefore she does not command Him as a mother here below would command her child who is below her . . . when we read then in the writings of Saints Bernard, Bernardine, Bonaventure and others, that in heaven and on earth everything, even God Himself, is subject to the Blessed Virgin, they mean that the authority which God has been well pleased to give her is so great that it seems as if she had the same power as God and that her prayers and petitions are so powerful with God that they always pass for commands with His Majesty who never resists the prayer of His dear Mother because she is always humble and conformed to His will.<sup>90</sup>

4. The fourth essential element of the Marian model is: Mary is the Mother of us all.

<sup>87</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 207; *True Devotion*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> *True Devotion*, 120; *Secret of Mary*, 6-8.

<sup>90</sup> *True Devotion*, 27.



Contrary to Boudon, one of his principal sources,<sup>91</sup> Montfort founds his Marian consecration not on the Queenship, but on the spiritual maternity, which is not for the saint an "adoptive motherhood"; it can truly be said that she gives us birth.<sup>92</sup> This essential element of the Marian model is so strongly accentuated by Montfort because it is a necessary consequence of the fact that she is the Mother of the Head of the mystical Body:

If Jesus Christ, the Head of men is born in her, the predestinate who are members of this Head must also be born in her by a necessary consequence. The same mother does not give birth to the Head without the Members nor to the members without the Head. Otherwise, it would be a monster in the order of nature; likewise, in the order of grace, the Head and Members are born of the same Mother. . . .<sup>93</sup>

This seemingly innocuous comparison is rather a solid theological argument, flowing from the salvific consent of Mary to the redemptive Incarnation and is used repeatedly by the magisterium. Again, her *Yes* plays a necessary role in the union of

<sup>91</sup> Cf. H. Boudon, *Oeuvres Complètes* (3 vols.; Paris: ed. Migne, 1856). The second volume of this edition contains *Dieu Seul ou le Saint Esclavage de l'Admirable Mère de Dieu*, 369-586. Although speaking of Mary as "Mère de bonté" (572), his stress is more on "Souveraine reine." The consecration at the end of his treatise, *Oraison pour s'offrir à la très-sainte Vierge, en qualité d'esclave*, contains no reference to the spiritual maternity.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Gaffney, *The Spiritual Maternity*, 79-84 and "The Holy Slavery of Love," 150-156. The following quotes from Montfort typify his thought: "The predestinate are hidden in Mary's womb and they are not born until this good Mother brings them forth to eternal life" (*The Secret of Mary*, 14) and "My womb gives you birth, it is I who engender you" (*Oeuvres, Cantique* 159:12). Cf. S. De Fiores, S.M.M., "La figura di Maria nel Trattato della vera devozione" in *Miles Immaculatae*, XIX (gennaio-settembre, 1983):61, "In una parola, Maria è una persona ricca di valori, soprattutto modello di santità e madre spirituale; ma tutt'altro che fermare a se in una maternità possessiva e captatrice, ella rimanda a Cristo e a Dio."

<sup>93</sup> *True Devotion*, 32; cf. *Secret of Mary*, 12; *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, 213. The same argument is found in Pius X, *Ad diem illum*, ActSS, XXXVI (1904-1905):452 and also in Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, ActApS, XXXV (1943):247-248.

Head and members in the Incarnate Wisdom. Her faith, her consent, her *fiat*, is her generative action. Therefore, Montfort can say “if Jesus is in our hearts, it is all thanks to Mary.”<sup>94</sup> Her motherhood is for Montfort, real, dynamic, truly influencing us to surrender to the Spirit—who alone, says Montfort, forms all “divine persons” outside the Trinity<sup>95</sup>—but always through his inseparable faithful Spouse,<sup>96</sup> through that eternal *Yes* which qualifies all salvation history because thus is the will of God.

We are, therefore, the “children” of Mary, and Montfort constantly stresses this theme,<sup>97</sup> finding some possible way of expressing the depth of this filiation through the famous Sulpician understanding—which Montfort attributes also to Saint Augustine—that we are in the womb of Mary.<sup>98</sup> As Jesus lives in Mary and chooses to depend upon her, so too the members of the Body are hidden in that immaculate womb and should—like Jesus—freely depend upon her.

5. This leads to the fifth and final element of the Marian model used by Montfort to call forth the Marian dimension of his consecration to the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom: Mary is Queen.

Number 37 of the *True Devotion* shows that Montfort speaks of the Queenship as the authority of a Mother:

We may evidently conclude, then, from what I have said, first of all, that Mary has received from God a great domination over the souls of the elect . . . for she cannot, as their mother, form, nourish

<sup>94</sup> *True Devotion*, 33.

<sup>95</sup> *Prayer for Missionaries*, 15; cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 141:2; *True Devotion*, 37.

<sup>96</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 13; cf. note 47 above.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. F. Setzer, S.M.M., “The Spiritual Maternity and Saint Louis Mary de Montfort” in *MS*, 3 (1952): 200, “The place of Mary in regard to us is conceived by Montfort as principally one of spiritual motherhood.” Any perusal of Montfort’s works leads to this conclusion although his terminology (e.g., “slave”) has been a stumbling block for some to an authentic understanding of his thought.

<sup>98</sup> *True Devotion*, 33; *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 213; *Secret of Mary*, 14.

and bring them forth to eternal life . . . unless she has a right and domination over their souls by a singular grace of the Most High . . . and so we can call her, as the saints do, the Queen of All Hearts.

At other times, the Queenship is also deduced from her union with her Son in the redemption of the world.<sup>99</sup> One thing is certain: Montfort does not oppose Spiritual Maternity to Queenship. They are for him inseparable. Her maternal authority is why Saint Louis sees reason in calling us children and slaves. The expression, “slaves”—although a scriptural term<sup>100</sup> and connoting no servility—was a problem even in Montfort’s day, but he will only settle for calling us “slaves of Jesus in Mary,”<sup>101</sup> for the term is important for him to express the evangelical dependence upon the Lord and—*servatis servandis*—upon the Mother of the Lord. Her Queenship makes her the *Maitresse*—the “Mistress” in Father Faber’s translation of the term—which connotes a maternal authority in teaching, raising, caring for us. To express this twofold dimension of Mary’s role towards men—a Mother with true authority in order to influence us to surrender to the Spirit—Montfort sees the correlative twofold title: children and slaves. Slave is most frequently used by Montfort as the superlative of child: so intensely a child, that there is the total dependence upon the eternal, efficacious *fiat* of this woman; we are as children in her womb, we are dependent upon her maternal authority. At other times, he uses the term “slave of Jesus in Mary” in a paradoxical sense, to imply true liberty. As shocking as the term may appear to many—and sound pastoral practise will dictate its use or omission in specific circumstances—Montfort’s understanding of it is surely evangelical and the concept cannot be ignored or glossed over without doing violence to the missionary’s thought.<sup>102</sup> If Mary is “Mother

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 74-76.

<sup>100</sup> Cf., e.g., Lk 1:38; Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1, etc.

<sup>101</sup> *True Devotion*, 245.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *The Secret of Mary*, 41; *True Devotion*, 169, 170, 215. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, while recognizing that some may be offended by the term “slave,” declared that he himself finds no difficulty with it: “On sait que l’au-

and Mistress,” or a Mother with true authority, then we are also “children and slaves.”

The label we can put on this Marian model which Montfort uses as a foundation for the Marian dimension of his covenant renewal is: “the complete spiritual maternity”<sup>103</sup> or the Royal Motherhood of Mary, which in turn is founded upon her role as Mother/Associate of the Redeemer.

## B. The Anthropological Model Employed by Montfort.

Before examining the consecration itself, it is necessary to join to the Marian model, Montfort’s understanding of the state of man: the anthropological model. These two models form the call, the need for total consecration to her. Four brief statements can summarize the anthropology of Montfort which is essential for his understanding of the necessary Marian dimension of any baptismal covenant renewal.

### 1. Man is radically affected by the sin of Adam.

Montfort’s anthropology may be called “Augustinian,” in the sense that he appears to have a pessimistic outlook on the nature of man and a vivid understanding of original sin and its devastating effects upon man.<sup>104</sup> Three times in his *True Devotion* alone, he describes man in this vein: “toads, snails, peacocks, pigs, worms, weathervanes.”<sup>105</sup> He even adds to this list words

teur du traité définit sa dévotion comme une forme d’ ‘esclavage.’ Le mot peut heurter nos contemporains. Pour moi, je ne vois là aucune difficulté. Je pense qu’il s’agit là d’une sorte de paradoxe comme on en relève souvent dans les Évangiles, les mots ‘saint-esclavage’ signifiant que nous ne saurions exploiter plus à fond notre liberté, le plus grand des dons que Dieu nous ait faits. Car la liberté se mesure à la mesure de l’amour dont nous sommes capables. C’est çela, je crois, que l’auteur a voulu nous montrer” (Frossard, *N’ayez pas peur*, 186-187).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Gaffney, “Holy Slavery of Love,” 152.

<sup>104</sup> The horror of original sin is accentuated by Montfort because of his descriptions of the sublime primordial state of man in original justice; cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 35-38, 64.

<sup>105</sup> 79, 213, 228.

taken from the works attributed to Saint Bernard, which Father Faber found it best to paraphrase and not to include: "*Cogita quid fueris: semen putridum; quid sis: vas stercorum; quid futurus sis: esca vermium.*"<sup>106</sup> These expressions do not give us any sense of self-worth and there is no doubt that Saint Louis, as a man of his age, intended that precise message. For this preacher of parish missions, Divine Wisdom did not come into this world to tell us how great we are without Him; rather, Incarnate Wisdom bluntly proclaims: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). The missionary's *expressions* may not be apropos in today's culture but his *theology* is surely evangelical: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (Jn 15:4). Montfort is explicitly speaking, as he says, "of relying on our own works and efforts and preparations in order to reach God and please Him,"<sup>107</sup> . . . "our incapacity for every good thing useful for salvation."<sup>108</sup> Like Augustine, Montfort is reacting to the ever-recurrent danger of Pelagianism.

Montfort is also, like Augustine, convinced of the ravages which original sin has caused in man, ravages—concupiscence—which remain even after baptism:

The sin of our first father has spoilt us all, soured us, puffed us up and corrupted us . . . our bodies are so corrupted that they are called by the Holy Spirit bodies of sin, conceived in sin, nourished in sin, capable of all sin, bodies subject to thousands of maladies which go on corrupting from day to day and which engender nothing but disease, vermin and corruption.<sup>109</sup>

He insists upon our "weakness in all things, our inconstancy at all times, our unworthiness of every grace, our iniquity wherever we may be."<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> *True Devotion*, 228. Father Faber translates this as "the vileness of our origin, the dishonors of our present state and our ending as the food of worms."

<sup>107</sup> *True Devotion*, 83.

<sup>108</sup> *True Devotion*, 79; *Secret of Mary*, 46.

<sup>109</sup> *True Devotion*, 79.

<sup>110</sup> *True Devotion*, 79.

Montfort is convinced that Adam is created in original justice and he goes to great lengths to express the beauty of man in this state.<sup>111</sup> The fall of man has consequences which we human beings are more prone to deny than to admit. His union with the Lord makes him extremely sensitive to sin, to anything which offends his "tender Jesus" (*le doux Jesus*); for the closer we are to God, the more we experience distance. The more in harmony we are with the Lord, the more we are sensitive to the shattering disharmony of sin. Saint Louis Mary, therefore, truly experiences the "sin of the world":

It is difficult to persevere in justice because of the strange corruption of this world. The world is now so corrupt that it seems inevitable that religious hearts should be soiled if not by its mud at least by its dust, so that it has become a kind of miracle for anyone to remain in the midst of that impetuous torrent without being drawn in by it, in the midst of that stormy sea without being drowned in it, or stripped by the pirates and the corsairs in the midst of that pestilent air without being infected by it.<sup>112</sup>

The realities of life, this vagabond missionary would call it. And his mystical yet so practical mind and heart cannot deny the reality of original sin, of concupiscence, of personal sin, of the sin of the world.

2. The goal of humankind is Jesus the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom.

It would be to take Montfort out of context to insist only on man's "incapacity of any good thing necessary for salvation." It would be to distort the missionary's preaching to stress his vivid images of man considered as a descendant of sinful Adam. There is far more to his anthropology. There is, to use Rahnerian terms, another "permanent existential" of man. Man's goal is Jesus, the New Adam, the loving, tender, approachable Jesus,

<sup>111</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 35-41.

<sup>112</sup> *True Devotion*, 89.

the Incarnate Wisdom of the Father. The beautiful description of his “First Truth of all Devotion to Mary” is one of the most moving sections of his writings:

Jesus Christ, Our Savior, true God and true Man, ought to be the last end of all our other devotions, else they are false and delusive. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. We labor not, as the Apostle says, except to render every man perfect in Jesus Christ; . . . He is our only Master Who has to teach us; our only Lord on Whom we ought to depend; our only Head to Whom we must be united; our only Model to Whom we should conform ourselves; our only Physician Who can heal us; our only Shepherd Who can feed us; our only Way who can lead us; our only Truth Whom we must believe, our only Life who can animate us, our only All in All Who can satisfy us . . . outside of him there exists nothing but error, falsehood, iniquity, futility, death and damnation. But if we are in Christ Jesus and Jesus Christ in us, we have no condemnation to fear.<sup>113</sup>

To know Jesus Christ—which for Montfort is always to be taken in its biblical sense of deeply experiencing Him [*gouter, faire goûter*], integrating Him into our lives—is the only reality. Outside of Jesus, there is only the unreal, the fake, the ersatz. His summary statement in the *Love of the Eternal Wisdom* encapsulates these thoughts:

To know Jesus Christ the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom is to know enough; to know everything else and not to know Him, is to know nothing.<sup>114</sup>

As strongly as Montfort insists upon the depravity of man left to himself, so wretched, so proud, even more strongly does he insist on the beauty and the power of man united through the Spirit to his goal, Jesus, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. One with the Incarnate Wisdom, “wretched” man becomes a “man-

<sup>113</sup> *True Devotion*, 61.

<sup>114</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 11; cf. *Letter to Friends of the Cross*, 26; *True Devotion*, 63.

God"<sup>115</sup> and the boldness of the missionary seems to know no bounds:

By Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ we can do all things . . . we can become perfect ourselves and be to our neighbor the good odor of eternal life.<sup>116</sup>

If we become immersed in Jesus, if this *kenosis-theosis* takes place within us, then the expressions Montfort uses to describe our weakness are transformed into exclamations of power and joy:

. . . burning fires lighting up the world like suns, peaceful sheep, chaste doves, royal eagles, swarms of honey bees, herd of fleet deer, a battalion of courageous lions, endowed with the swiftness of the eagle. . . .<sup>117</sup>

These expressions must counterbalance the ones he uses to express our nothingness without the Lord for, according to Montfort's evangelical optimism, in Jesus Christ we can do all things, we can renew the face of the earth; for, through faith, we share in the omnipotence of God.

### 3. We need a Mediatrix with the Mediator.

Montfort's third point of his anthropology is then quite logical. If we are of ourselves so wretched, yet our only goal is the beautiful God-Man Himself whose loving, empowering call falls upon deaf ears because of our sin and the sin of the world, then we need some help to arrive at that goal. For it is only in and

<sup>115</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 17; cf. 3; cf. *True Devotion*, 157: "He Who is has willed to come to that which is not and to make that which is not, become He Who is."

<sup>116</sup> *True Devotion*, 61; cf. 56.

<sup>117</sup> *Prayer for Missionaries*, 18. Although these expressions are used explicitly for his missionary community, they also apply to that "great squadron of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women," who will "combat the world, the devil and corrupted nature in those more than ever perilous times which are about to come" (*True Devotion*, 114).



through that goal—Eternal, tender, powerful Wisdom—that we can be the apostles of Jesus. We are in need, therefore, of a “Mediator with the Mediator Himself.”<sup>118</sup> If we are slaves of sin yet called to be slaves of love of Jesus—which means that we topple all created idols and serve the Lord alone like Michael of old crying out “Who is like unto God?”<sup>119</sup>—then we must call upon *the mediators which the Lord has given us*.<sup>120</sup> Again, Montfort falls back on his principle “the present order of things.” And in the present order of the economy of salvation, Montfort declares:

He has provided us with powerful intercessors with His Grandeur so that to neglect these mediators and to draw near to His Holiness directly and without any recommendation is to fail in humility, it is to fail in respect toward God so high, so holy. It is to make less account of that King of Kings than we should make of a king or prince of this earth.<sup>121</sup>

Montfort is not only using the cultural analogies of his day; he is insisting that God has given us Mediators—not only Mary, but all the saints—and in that communion of saints, to neglect these powerful intercessors would be to invent again a dream world. Of these mediators, there is no one who can compare to the Mother of God and the Mother of men, the Immaculate Mary, the throne of Divine Wisdom. Mary eminently fills this need we have of a help to arrive at Divine Wisdom since she is the Mother of Grace, and since God has given her to us as the way to Him, for she is His way to us.<sup>122</sup>

Objection has been raised against this principle of Montfort, primarily because his understanding of “mediatrix,” or “through Mary” has been sadly twisted. In the eyes of this mis-

<sup>118</sup> *True Devotion*, 83.

<sup>119</sup> *Prayer for Missionaries*, 28.

<sup>120</sup> Montfort possessed a vivid understanding of the communion of saints and often refers to them and to the angels as our God-given friends and intercessors; cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 110, 121, 127.

<sup>121</sup> *True Devotion*, 84.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 27, 44.

sionary, no one is more approachable, more lovable, than the tender Jesus. His chapters on the tenderness, the humanness, the simplicity of Jesus in *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, in his *Cantiques* on Jesus<sup>123</sup>—an antiochene element in his Christology—all bear this out. When he speaks of “mediators” or going *through* Mary, he is not setting up Our Lady as a barricade which must be pierced before reaching the Lord; he is not speaking of a hurdle which must be surmounted before arriving at the goal; he is not speaking of any chronological procedure. As he explains it, it is with Mary that we arrive at Jesus more quickly, love Him more tenderly, serve Him more faithfully.<sup>124</sup> In Montfort’s eyes, the “through Mary” brings about a more intensely immediate union with the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom.<sup>125</sup> She does not stand in the way. She is the “mysterious milieu,”<sup>126</sup> the atmosphere,<sup>127</sup> as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote after reading Montfort,<sup>128</sup> which only enhances, intensifies this union. To withdraw from this atmosphere, this milieu which God has given to us, to try to circumvent the quickening catalyst of Mary with which God has so kindly endowed us, is to ignore the role of Mary in salvation history; it is to show disrespect for God. At least implicitly, everyone comes to Jesus through the means He takes to come to us: through Mary. Again, for Montfort, this refers to the ineradicable characteristic of all salvation history: the necessary, representative, salvific, eternal consent of Mary. Far from denying the beauty of Jesus, Mary as Mediator “of interces-

<sup>123</sup> Cf. *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*, 104-132; *Oeuvres, Cantique*, 57 to 66.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 62.

<sup>125</sup> Montfort insists that by going “through Mary” we will find Jesus “more perfectly” (Cf. *True Devotion*, 165.), that she is no “stumbling-block” nor “hindrance” (164), rather she is an “easy . . . short . . . perfect . . . and secure road which conducts us to Jesus Christ and life eternal in a straight and secure manner” (168). Cf. *Secret of Mary*, 21.

<sup>126</sup> *True Devotion*, 165. Father Faber’s translation omits this expression which is clearly in the manuscript.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 217.

<sup>128</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Mary Compared to the Air We Breathe” in J. Pick, *A Hopkins Reader* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1966), 70-73. (Cf. Sr. M. Teresa Wolking, O.S.B., “Mary Compared to the Air We Breathe,” *Queen* [Jan.-Feb., 1953]: 13ff.)

sion" with the "Mediator of redemption"<sup>129</sup> affirms the uniqueness of "the one and only mediator between God and Man, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5) while also affirming our own weakness and the will of God in this present order of salvation.

#### 4. We are the slaves of Jesus and Mary.

The final point to consider in Montfort's anthropology is that we are, thanks to the redemptive Incarnation, "the slaves of Jesus Christ."<sup>130</sup> Again, Montfort will insist on this scriptural term, even though he may, because of possible misunderstandings, declare that at times considering the audience, it is best not to say "slaves of Mary" rather, "slaves of Jesus in Mary."<sup>131</sup>

However, the important point for Montfort is that willy-nilly, we are the slaves of Jesus and Mary. Again, he insists that this is a fact of life, a fact of salvation history which cannot be denied without tearing the Scriptures in shreds. It is part of the very definition of man.<sup>132</sup> Redemption is found in no other than in Jesus. This total dependence on Jesus the Redeemer is a reality in the present order of things. But because God has willed Mary to be uniquely and eternally a part of the redemptive Incarnation by her community consent, we must also say that we belong to Mary—*servatis servandis*—as her slaves too; we depend upon the fruit of her womb, we depend upon her eternal *fiat* and in that sense we are her children who *de facto* can say we have been redeemed by the Hail Mary.<sup>133</sup> Since Mary plays this necessary role in the redemptive incarnation we belong to Jesus and Mary—in different manners, yes, but we do belong to them. In consenting in our name to the inbreaking of God's healing, she has a maternal authority over us and we may

. . . therefore, following the sentiments of the saints and of many great men, call ourselves and make ourselves the loving slaves of the

<sup>129</sup> *True Devotion*, 84, 86.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 73.

<sup>131</sup> *True Devotion*, 244-245.

<sup>132</sup> Montfort insists that by our very nature, we are the slaves of God, slaves of Jesus and Mary because of God's plan of salvation. (Cf. *True Devotion*, 70.)

<sup>133</sup> *Oeuvres, Canticque* 89:6.

most Holy Virgin Mary in order to be by that very means the more perfectly the slaves of Jesus Christ.<sup>134</sup>

In the present order of things, what is said absolutely of Jesus is to be said relatively of Our Lady;<sup>135</sup> she therefore shares, in the redemptive conquest. We belong to Jesus and Mary as their slaves, enjoying, therefore, the freedom of the children of God. We have been lovingly conquered by Jesus who redeems us through the consent of a woman of our race, a consent which enters into the very fabric of the redemption. In the eyes of this contemplative vagabond preacher, man is not *homo rationalis*, period. Considering mankind théologically, Montfort sees us as called to a supernatural destiny who is the exalted yet so tender Jesus the God-man. However, we are in a condition of wretchedness because of original and personal sin; redeemed by Jesus through Mary, we therefore belong to them. These factors are essential elements *in the present order of things* and enter, as far as Montfort is concerned, into the very nature of man. Strictly speaking, it is then not a question of *making* Jesus the Lord of our life—it is not a question of *making* Mary our Mother and Mistress—they are such *de facto*, in the reality of God's history of salvation, whether we accept the situation or reject it.

Having posited such a foundation, then the Marian dimension of consecration necessarily follows. We must formally and lovingly accept the reality of salvation history. We must surrender to Jesus, becoming his slaves not just of nature or constraint but slaves of love. We must accept the freedom of evangelical slavery. However, we cannot separate Jesus from Mary; we cannot wrench Mary from the redemptive Incarnation and still be within the will of God. Unless we wish to do violence to the Scriptures, we must recognize in a practical, personal manner the fact of Mary's role in salvation history. Called to share in the life of God through grace, we must find the treasury of grace who is Mary. Called to be one with our loving yet so exalted divine Wisdom, we must approach him through the mediatrix he

<sup>134</sup> *True Devotion*, 75.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 74.

has given us, the means he has taken and therefore takes to come to us. There must be, therefore, a Marian dimension in any authentically Christian baptismal covenant renewal.

### III

The consecration proposed by Saint Louis de Montfort is the logical consequence of his theological foundations. Presuming always the clearly Trinitarian/Christological character of the *Act of Consecration to the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom*, we can briefly review this formula in its Marian dimension by examining its two essential aspects: the content of the consecration formula and, secondly, the living of the consecration.

#### A. The Content of the Consecration Formula.

Although the formula of the consecration is found only in the manuscript of *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*,<sup>136</sup> Saint Louis de Montfort explains its contents somewhat at length especially in *The True Devotion*<sup>137</sup> and also in *The Secret of Mary*<sup>138</sup> and in *The Love of the Eternal Wisdom*.<sup>139</sup> Other works also make reference to it.<sup>140</sup> Although the formula shows a marked dependence on similar *Acts of Consecration* in use in his time,<sup>141</sup> nonetheless, he has refined it and made it his own. Three points will help us clarify the basic content of the formula of consecration.

<sup>136</sup> 223-227; Montfort does speak in the *True Devotion* of the formula of consecration which, he says, "they will find . . . further on" (231). However, the present state of the manuscript has no act of consecration. Whether it would be identical to the one proposed in his earlier work, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, is a matter of conjecture.

<sup>137</sup> 120-273.

<sup>138</sup> 28-78.

<sup>139</sup> 219-227.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres, Cantique* 49, 77; *Prayer for Missionaries*, 7-12.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Boudon, *Dieu Seul*, 583-586; cf. *Oeuvres*, p. 214, note 1, where the editor (Marcel Gendrot, S.M.M.) declares: "On constatera facilement des contacts littéraires (dépendance?) entre cette Consécration du P de Montfort et celles de F. Nepveu, S.J., *Exercices intérieurs pour honorer les mystères de Jésus Christ* notamment dans son premier exercice."

## 1. The Act of Consecration is the renewal of Baptism.

Basically, what Montfort is calling for is a formal, loving practical recognition of the reality of salvation history. Through Christ, our Mediator of Redemption, we have, in the power of the Spirit, been made one with the Father. This is reality. It is God's irrevocable decree. Through Baptism we have been inserted into the saving life of this New Adam. The *Act of Consecration* is, then, nothing less than the renewal of our Baptism—a formal, loving, deeper acceptance of reality:

I renew and ratify today in thy hands the vows of Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before.<sup>142</sup>

This stress on Baptism, so central in Montfort's life and apostolate,<sup>143</sup> is at the root of the *Act of Consecration*. In fact, he so equates consecration with the renewal of Baptism that he can say that it is impossible to reject the consecration without overturning Christianity itself.<sup>144</sup> It is why he can state:

No one can object to this devotion as being either a new or an indifferent one. It is not new, because the Councils, the Fathers and many authors both ancient and modern speak of this consecration to Our Lord or renewal of the vows and promises of Baptism as of a thing anciently practised and which they counsel to all Christians. Neither is it a matter of indifference; because the principal source of all disorders, and consequently of the eternal perdition of Chris-

<sup>142</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 225.

<sup>143</sup> Not only does Montfort constantly preach the renewal of Baptism and order his missionary community to do the same (Cf. *Oeuvres, Regles des Pretres Missionnaires de la compagnie de Marie*, 56.), but he chose to drop his family name, Grignon, in order to be called simply, the Father from Montfort (le père de Montfort) not because of any attachment to his birthplace where he resided for such a short time, but most probably because it was there that he was baptized into Christ.

<sup>144</sup> *True Devotion*, 163.

tians, comes from their forgetfulness and indifference about this practise.<sup>145</sup>

Having been requested by Pope Clement XI to preach the renewal of Baptism throughout Western France, Montfort remained constantly faithful to this mandate of the Holy Father. His call for consecration is but the fulfilling of this order. During his missions, he would highly dramatize this *contrat d'alliance* by having the parishioners proceed first to the baptismal font, where they would formally renew their baptism, then to the altar of Our Lady where they would consecrate themselves to her. Before the entire congregation, the deacon would then elevate the Scriptures three times as the missionary would ask the faithful to accept the truth and power of the Word of God. With the Book of Scriptures held close to his heart, the missionary would then mount the pulpit to preach his sermon.<sup>146</sup>

2. The Consecration is a perfect renewal of Baptism, since accomplished explicitly through Mary.

In Montfort's dramatization of this *Act of Consecration*, there is not only the renewal of baptism at the font; there is always the procession to the altar of Our Lady. The reason is clear from his theological foundations. How is it possible to renew our baptism, our insertion into the life of Christ, if we ignore the necessary and intrinsic element of Mary's participation in the redemption? It is for this reason that Montfort calls his consecration the "perfect" renewal of the vows of Baptism, because, as he states:

The most perfect consecration to Jesus Christ is nothing else but a perfect and entire consecration of ourselves to the Blessed Virgin.<sup>147</sup>

In holy Baptism, we do not give ourselves to Jesus by the hands of Mary at least not in an explicit manner.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>145</sup> *True Devotion*, 131; 126-130 deal explicitly with the consecration as the renewal of the vows of baptism.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Grandet, *La vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, 406-412.

<sup>147</sup> *True Devotion*, 120.

<sup>148</sup> *True Devotion*, 126.

Montfort then calls for an explicit recognition, within the framework of the renewal of Baptism, of Mary's role in salvation history. Or better still, he sees Mary as so intrinsic to salvation history, that the sacrament of Baptism has a necessary Marian dimension which follows from his theological foundations. Since he terms his *Act of Consecration* a renewal of Baptism, it must, according to his thought, have a Marian dimension. His formula of consecration intermingles, therefore, the demands of Baptism and the role of Mary:

O Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom! O sweetest and adorable Jesus . . . I adore Thee profoundly in the bosom and splendors of Thy Father during eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, thy Most Holy Mother, in the time of Thy Incarnation. . . . Ungrateful and unfaithful as I have been, I have not kept the promises which I made so solemnly to Thee in my Baptism, I have not fulfilled my obligations. . . . I have recourse [then] to the intercession of Thy Most Holy Mother, whom Thou has given me as mediatrix with Thee and it is through her that I hope to obtain from Thee contrition and pardon for my sins and the acquisition and preservation of Wisdom.<sup>149</sup>

The missionary bemoans the fact that this role of Mary is so little known and therefore our life in Christ is not as strong as it should be.<sup>150</sup> He calls, then, for an explicit recognition of Mary's evangelical role. The *Act of Consecration* is then a "perfect," joyful acceptance of our loving conquest by Jesus and Mary.

3. The Consecration is a perfect renewal of Baptism since it formally and lovingly surrenders all to Jesus and Mary so that we may more deeply share the Life of the Spirit.

Two points are being stated here: our total surrender to Jesus and Mary and, as a consequence, a deeper sharing of their life. Montfort is a man of the "absolute" — he must go the limit. We

<sup>149</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 223.

<sup>150</sup> "If then, as is certain, the knowledge and the kingdom of Jesus Christ are to come into the world, they will be but a necessary consequence of the knowledge and the kingdom of the most holy Virgin Mary, who brought Him into the world for the first time and will make His second coming full of splendor" (*True Devotion*, 13).



are the loving conquest by Jesus and Mary; then we must surrender all to them. The missionary calls for the most radical poverty possible, stripping ourselves of everything, of any of this "make-believe" ownership; for everything belongs to Jesus and Mary. His love of practical poverty is but an outgrowth of the loving acceptance of the reality of his existential poverty. He is nothing. All depends on our Loving Father who redeems us in Christ but only through the consent of Mary. For Montfort, this is reality. To declare that we are anything of ourselves is absurd. All is grace, all is gift. There is absolutely no self-redemption, no Pelagianism, in Montfort's thought. All belongs to Jesus and Mary.

We are all the slaves of Jesus and Mary because of salvation history. "Baptism has made us the slaves of Jesus Christ," affirms the missionary.<sup>151</sup> Through the consecration, we transfer from merely "slaves of nature," to "slaves of love."<sup>152</sup> We willingly and lovingly recognize the state of affairs: we belong to Jesus and Mary.

In the language of popular piety, Montfort speaks of "giving," of "consecrating," yet he recognizes that this is a manner of speaking, for we already do belong to Jesus and Mary. "To give" to them is to ratify, lovingly and formally, what is already a fact. It is to accept reality. Since a gift becomes real to the extent that it is accepted, this formal acceptance of the reality of salvation history—the consecration—does, of course, have profound effects and consequences. In accepting the gift of Jesus as Brother and Redeemer and of Mary as the Associate of the Redeemer—Our Mother and Queen—in accepting that, we belong entirely to them; the power of the redemption is more firmly implemented in our lives. The Consecration advocated by Saint Louis de Montfort accepts TOTALLY, to the utter extreme possible, this loving conquest of Jesus and Mary. TOTUS TUUS, as Pope John Paul II's Montfortian motto reads.<sup>153</sup> And the TO-

<sup>151</sup> *True Devotion*, 73.

<sup>152</sup> *True Devotion*, 70.

<sup>153</sup> *True Devotion*, 233: "I am all Thine and all that I have is Thine, O most loving Jesus, through Mary, Thy most holy Mother." For a somewhat different understanding of *Totus Tuus*, cf. *True Devotion*, 216 and also *Oeuvres, Prières du matin et du soir, La Petite Couronne de la sainte vierge*, 5: "*Totus ego sum et omnia mea tua sunt, O Virgo super omnia benedicta.*"

TUS, for Montfort, has no exceptions. The "I" must freely empty itself into THE THOU so that it may be its true self. In the *Act of Consecration*, man finds his identity not in the pride of posing as being-in-itself but in the humility of a loving, lived out relationship with THE OTHER, the source of all being, Love itself. The formula of consecration itself speaks of this total emptying so that we may share fully in the power of the redemption, the life of Divine Wisdom:

Grant the desire which I have to obtain Divine Wisdom and for this purpose, deign to accept the offering and promises which my lowliness presents to Thee. . . . I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ . . . I choose thee for my Mother and Mistress. . . . Receive, O gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery which I make to honor and identify myself with the state of dependence Divine Wisdom was pleased to have towards thee, His Mother, and as an acknowledgment of the power you both have over me . . . Mother most admirable, present me to thy dear Son as His eternal slave, so that as He has redeemed me by thee, by thee He may receive me! O Mother of Mercy, grant that I may obtain the true Wisdom of God.<sup>154</sup>

To stress this *kenosis*, this utter poverty which is intrinsic to consecration in order to share in the *theosis*, the treasures of the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, Montfort, following the custom of the times, itemizes what we "give" to Mary (which is of course, to give to Jesus as final goal).<sup>155</sup> Closely following Bou-  
don, Montfort declares:

This devotion consists, then in giving ourselves entirely to Our Lady in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. We must give her  
1. our body with all its senses and its members; 2. our soul with all its powers; 3. our exterior goods of fortune whether present or to come; 4. our interior and spiritual goods which are our merits and our virtues, and our good works, past, present and future. In a word, we must give her all we have in the order of nature and in the order of grace and all that may become ours in the future in the or-

<sup>154</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 225-226.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *True Devotion*, 148.

ders of nature, grace and glory and this we must do without the reserve of so much as one farthing, one hair, or one least good action and we must do it also for all eternity and we must do it further, without pretending to or hoping for any recompense for our offering and service except the honor of belonging to Jesus Christ through Mary and in Mary. . . .<sup>156</sup>

Therefore, in the *Act of Consecration*, Montfort speaks of consecrating

. . . my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior and even the value of all my good actions, past, present and future, giving to thee the entire and full right of disposing of me and all that belongs to me without exception . . . for the greater glory of God in time and in eternity.<sup>157</sup>

The theological language may not be ours, the style may not be that of a modern preacher. But the thought of Montfort is clear: everything is surrendered, because through the redemptive Incarnation everything belongs to Jesus and Mary. There is one point which Montfort—like Boudon—makes explicit, for the missionary sees in it the one element of our lives which someone may insist as his own: the value of all our good actions. Although making the distinction between various forms of merit, and stating categorically that “our merits, graces and virtues are, properly speaking, incommunicable . . . our satisfactions we give to her to communicate to whom she likes for the greatest glory of God,”<sup>158</sup> Montfort insists that all, to the absolute extent possible, must be given to Mary, and, of course, therefore to Jesus as final goal. In doing so, Montfort declares, we are actually going beyond what is demanded even of religious, for by these vows:

. . . we do not give Him the liberty or the right to dispose of the value of our good works and we do not strip ourselves as far as a

<sup>156</sup> *True Devotion*, 121.

<sup>157</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 224-227.

<sup>158</sup> *True Devotion*, 122.

Christian can do so of that which is dearest and most precious, our merits and satisfactions.<sup>159</sup>

It could be said that even this aspect of our lives is included at least implicitly in any consecration, for we do everything “according to His will.” However, Montfort sees that man, because of the grace of God, is enabled to do something valuable and gain personal merit, even if it be only merit in an analagous sense when compared to the merit of Christ the Head. For the grace of Christ accepted by man is changed in the exercise of human freedom into his “merit.”<sup>160</sup> The transforming grace of God makes man a true although, of course, an unequal partner of God, always because of the dynamic of grace.

It is even this so utterly personal corner of the human heart, that Montfort declares must belong to the Lord. He sees it as one element which through the empowering grace of God, man can in a certain sense claim as his own: his merits and satisfactions. No matter how modern theology may explain the intricate meaning of merit and justification, the thought of the missionary is clear. Nothing whatsoever is to be withheld in this *Act of Consecration*. It is to be absolute: a total stripping, even of the value of our good actions considered as our own because of the mysterious union of grace and free-will. The poverty is to be complete. The *kenosis* is to be total. For only then, in Montfort’s eyes, are we effectively recognizing the reality that we are redeemed by Jesus through Mary. Only then do we fully experience the other side of the coin of consecration, the *theosis* or the more intimate sharing in the life of Jesus and Mary. It is this constant dynamic—or evangelical paradox—stripping/being clothed, poverty/wealth, surrender/victory, slavery/freedom, which runs through Montfort’s understanding of the *Act of Consecration*. We surrender all, in order to be totally open to the power of the redemption which comes to us from Jesus through the necessary, eternal *fiat* of Mary. As the perfect re-

<sup>159</sup> *True Devotion*, 123.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. W. Molinski, “Merit” in *Encyclopedia of Theology, The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 954-958.

newal of our Baptism, the consecration is nothing less than implementing in us a new depth of life in Christ, Eternal Wisdom, the Son of Mary. In no way does the missionary go beyond the Gospel. But he does go the ultimate limit.

#### B. The Consecration as a Life Lived in Union with Mary.

Since "the essential of this devotion consists in the interior which it ought to form,"<sup>161</sup> Montfort describes not only some external actions which should characterize anyone who has so surrendered to the Lord, but especially "interior practises."<sup>162</sup>

Montfort, the missionary, is a realist. The consecration, an act of absolute, total surrender of one's self to Christ through Mary, is the beginning or the deepening of a permanent state of evangelical dependence on Jesus and Mary so as to live the details of life in conformity with the radical demands of the gospel.<sup>163</sup> The interior practises indicate the spirit of this permanent state which the *Act of Consecration* has begun. Although explained somewhat differently in the *Secret of Mary* and in the *True Devotion to Mary*, the essential elements are identical:

. . . to do all our actions through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, so that we may do them all the more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus and for Jesus.<sup>164</sup>

Again, a double movement encompasses these interior practises:

The soul must first of all renounce its own spirit and its own lights and wills before it does anything . . . secondly, we must deliver ourselves to the spirit of Mary to be moved and influenced by it in the manner she chooses. We must put ourselves and leave ourselves in her virginal hands like a tool in the grasp of a workman, like a lute in the hands of a skilful player.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup> *True Devotion*, 19.

<sup>162</sup> *True Devotion*, 257-265; *Secret of Mary*, 43-52. Montfort insists more on the interior spirit of consecration than the particular exterior expressions of it.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. A. Bossard, S.M.M., "Marie 'Milieu Mystérieux' pour rejoindre le Christ" in Barbera, *Dieu Seul*:132-144.

<sup>164</sup> *True Devotion*, 257.

<sup>165</sup> *True Devotion*, 259.

Mary becomes, through these interior practises, a more explicit element of the "mysterious milieu"<sup>166</sup> in which we live our faith. The spirit of Mary truly becomes ours so that we may be more intensely one with Christ for the glory of the Father. The penetrating spirit of Mary is nothing less than the active Spirit, for she is so utterly transformed by grace into the Lord. In this world,<sup>167</sup> in this oratory,<sup>168</sup> in this Paradise,<sup>169</sup> of Mary, we more fully live out our life in Christ.

This essential interior spirit must express itself in the manner in which we live and Montfort does not hesitate to describe some exterior practises, which are perhaps summarized by speaking of a "special devotion to the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Word."<sup>170</sup> Jesus living in Mary surrenders Himself for this world to the Father; so through this consecration, through this perfect renewal of our Christian life of Baptism, we live in Mary, spending our lives for others so as to transform the world into the Father's glory. The norms, the value-systems of the world cannot be the characteristics of the loving slave of Jesus in Mary.<sup>171</sup> Such a person must be counter-culture, living a life dictated by the Gospel norms and not by the ideals of the world, a person boldly undertaking great things for God and for the salvation of souls.<sup>172</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Montfort the missionary believes himself called by God to renew the spirit of the Catholic faith through the lived-out *Consecration to the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom*. This perfect renewal of our baptismal vows must, in order to be faithful to the Word as lived within the Church, have a clear Marian dimen-

<sup>166</sup> *True Devotion*, 265.

<sup>167</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 208; *Secret of Mary*, 19; *True Devotion*, 6.

<sup>168</sup> *Secret of Mary*, 47; *Oeuvres, Cantique* 75:3, 77:6, 82:8.

<sup>169</sup> *Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 208; *Secret of Mary*, 19; *True Devotion*, 6, 18, 45, 148, 261, 263.

<sup>170</sup> *True Devotion*, 243.

<sup>171</sup> *True Devotion*, 256.

<sup>172</sup> *True Devotion*, 214.

sion. St. Louis de Montfort's call, drawn from a constant assimilation of the Scriptures as lived, prayed and taught within the Church, is radical, absolute. The Gospel must be taken at its word and lived to the hilt, in spite of the attractions of the world. Although his expressions, his descriptions, his manner of presenting Mary and living devotion to her are not the only authentic ones and need to be adapted to the variety of modern cultures today, in its basic thrust, Montfort's consecration is but the living out of the Gospel itself.<sup>173</sup> It therefore has a relevance,<sup>174</sup> an urgency for all times, perhaps in a special way, for our own. For in this nuclear age, never was man so urgently called "to reform the Church and renew the face of the earth" through the power of the Spirit. And it is this precisely which Saint Louis de Montfort's teaching on Marian consecration aims to accomplish.

Dieu Seul

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<sup>173</sup> The words of Pope John Paul II concerning the effect of the consecration as explained by Saint Louis de Montfort clarify this point: ". . . cette 'dévotion parfaite' est indispensable à qui entend se donner sans réserve au Christ et à l'oeuvre de la rédemption. Grignon de Montfort nous introduit dans l'agencement même des mystères dont vit notre foi, qui la font croître et la rendent féconde. Plus ma vie intérieure a été centrée sur la réalité de la Rédemption, plus l'abandon à Marie, dans l'esprit de saint Louis Grignon de Montfort, m'est apparu comme le meilleur moyen de participer avec fruit et efficacité à cette réalité, pour y puiser et en partager avec les autres les richesses inexprimables." (Frossard, *N'ayez pas peur*, 186).

<sup>174</sup> There is an evident similarity between the Marian thought of Saint Louis de Montfort and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on Our Lady: both are basically commentaries on Mary's consent, on Mary's faith. The *Act of Entrusting* of Pope John Paul II also exemplifies the thought of Montfort. (Cf. Gaffney, "A Theological Study," 11.)