

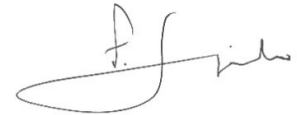
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary



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**Montfortian Heritage
in North America**

Inspired by this feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, let us help each other to make the practice of true devotion, according to St. Louis Marie de Montfort, a path of holiness, as a path of true commitment to the poor and marginalized.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Stefani', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Fr. Luiz Augusto Stefani, smm
Superior General

Rome, 8 December 2017

Works of Montfort quoted

Hymns: Montfort wrote 164 hymns, the majority of them containing more than 100 verses. Destined to be used in parish missions, their theological and spiritual depth are presented in a simple accessible language.

Letters: there exists 34 letters of Montfort, ranging from his study years to that of his death.

LEW: Love of Eternal Wisdom: a major work of Montfort centred on the love of Christ. In it, devotion to Mary is well situated.

Prayer for Missionaries: an ardent prayer Montfort wrote to obtain missionaries

Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary: this is the rule Montfort wrote for his congregation of missionaries, describing their work and lifestyle.

Rule of the White Penitents: this set of rules was given to the group of laypersons that made a pilgrimage to obtain missionaries.

SM: Secret of Mary: It is a short presentation of Montfort's devotion to Mary.

TD: True Devotion to Mary: this is Montfort's most well-known writing. The title 'True Devotion to Mary' is not from Montfort, but from the first editors. The hypothesis has been made that the original title was 'Preparation to the Kingdom of Christ' (TD No 227)

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.” (Eph. 1, 3-6)

Dear Friends,

Laity and Religious, who exercise different ministries in the Church, leaders of communities, priests and bishops,

Receive a fraternal greeting from the Montfort Missionaries spread throughout the world. Joy and Peace in him who is the reason for our hope, Jesus Christ our Lord.

On the occasion of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 2015, Pope Francis offered the following reflection:

“Celebrating this feast entails two things. First: fully welcoming God and his merciful grace into our life. Second: becoming in our turn artisans of mercy by means of an evangelical journey. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception then becomes the feast of all of us if, with our daily “yes”, we manage to

overcome our selfishness and make the life of our brothers ever more glad, to give them hope, by drying a few tears and giving a bit of joy. In imitation of Mary, we are called to become bearers of Christ and witnesses to his love, looking first of all to those who are privileged in the eyes of Jesus. It is they who he himself indicated: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36)."

The purpose of this letter is to offer some knowledge, albeit in a summary fashion, of what we find in the spirituality of the Marian Consecration of Saint Louis de Montfort; *"Jesus, our Savior, true God and true man must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions..."* (True Devotion, 61). Our wider desire is that Montfortian spirituality might help us to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ, with His unconditional love for humanity.

We know that some persons, some groups and some Institutes of Consecrated Life who promote the *"Consecration to Jesus through the hands of Mary"*, according to the method of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, have caused serious pastoral problems for various parishes and dioceses. Some bishops have contacted us seeking clarifications: on the relationship of the Montfortian Congregation with certain specific groups and on the current state of Montfortian spirituality, especially in regard to the practice of the *"True Devotion to Our Lady"* proposed by St. Louis Marie de Montfort.

The early Christian communities also passed through difficulties of this kind and wrote: *"We have heard that some of our number without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings*

practices, the part on the wearing of chains occupies but a sixth of the whole presentation, and in it Montfort insists more on the motivations than on practical details.

Conclusion

Montfort's spirituality is not the property of the Montfortian Congregations. It was given by the Holy Spirit to the whole Church. However, as heirs of Montfort, the members of those congregations are vigilant on the ways that spirituality is presented. They want it to be rooted in and nourished by all the writings of Montfort, to be done in the light of his own pastoral practice. They also wish that all be done in harmony with the pastoral practice of the dioceses where one wishes to implant it, and in relation with local authorities.

Montfort has wanted to share with us his own spiritual experience which is *"a secret of holiness"* (Hymn 77, 19). The best way we can be faithful to him is by deepening his thought to better respect it and implement it. Thus, as saint John Paul II invites us to, we will be striving towards the same goal as Montfort.

"In the course of history, the People of God have experienced this gift received from Christ crucified: the gift of His Mother. The Virgin Mary is truly our Mother. She accompanies us in our pilgrimage of faith, hope and charity, towards an ever more intense union with Christ, unique saviour and mediator of salvation. (Lumen Gentium N^{os} 60, 62)"

(Saint John-Paul II's letter to the Montfortian family)

Concerning **exterior practices**, Montfort cautions us on two points. First, one must not concentrate exclusively on external practices. “I found many persons, he writes, who very generously entered into this holy enslavement, but exteriorly. I have found but a few who really entered into its spirit” (*SM* 44). Secondly Montfort cautions us not to neglect these exterior practices: “Though this devotion is essentially interior, it has many exterior practices one should not neglect” (*VD* 226). If in his book *True Devotion to Mary*, Montfort gives seven such practices, he reduces them to five in his other writing *The Secret of Mary*:

Exterior practices of the true devotion		
PRACTICE	stated in TD	stated in SM
1. Preparation and Consecration	TD 227-233	SM 61-62 (1 st and 2 nd)
2. Praying the “Little Crown”	TD 234-235	SM 64 (4 th)
3. Wearing “small iron chains”	TD 236-242	SM 65 (5 th)
4. Devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation	TD 243-248	SM 63 (3 rd)
5. Devotion to the Ave Maria and the Rosary	TD 249-254	
6. Reciting the Magnificat	TD 255	SM 64 (4 th)
7. Despising, hating and fleeing from the corrupted world	TD 256	

Concerning the wearing of small chains, Montfort states that this practice is a means and does not bear on the essence of the devotion, so that “a person can very well do without it” (*TD* 236). But nonetheless, one should not disregard it (*SM* 65 and *TD* 236). In the presentation he makes of external

and disturbed your peace of mind” (Acts 15, 24). We do not send this letter to anyone personally, but rather to manifest our communion with all of you.

Despite the fact of being signed by me, this letter was written by various hands and in accordance with the reality of each Continent.

A LARGE FAMILY

The identity of each person is almost always linked with a someone, with a place, a past, in short, with a history. It is no different with the Montfort Missionaries.

It is difficult to introduce ourselves without making reference to someone very special, from whom we have received our name: *St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort*. He is much better known than his missionaries. We are known because of him, his passion for Christ, for Mary, for the poor and the missions.

Our Holy Founder wanted us to present ourselves thus: “*Liberos... men who are free, men filled with the Holy Spirit, who move like clouds in the sky wherever the Spirit leads them.*” I would also like that we be known as “*friends of the poor*”. Or even more, “*true children of Mary, who, with the rosary and the gospel, will bring the fire of the love of God to every place.*” (Prayer for Missionaries, 12)

We form part of a large family, the MONTFORTIAN FAMILY consists of the Montfort Missionaries, the Daughters of Wisdom and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel. We are at the service of the mission on the five Continents, present in more than 30

countries. Lay persons consecrated to Jesus through Mary share with us the same spirituality and the same mission.

The Montfortian charism and spirituality, however, surpasses the frontiers of the countries where we are; thus, there is an incalculable number of lay people who assume with enthusiasm the promises of baptism through the “Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary”, making the Montfortian Family more numerous still, and present in countries where the Montfortian Congregation as such is not yet present.

THE REQUEST OF A POPE AND THE PRESENT SITUATION OF MONTFORT’S PROPOSAL

June 21, 1997, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the canonization of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, Saint John Paul II made this request of us:

“Dear brothers and sisters of the great Montfortian Family, in this year of prayer and reflection on the precious heritage of St Louis-Marie, I encourage you: make this treasure bear fruit; it must not remain hidden. The teaching of your founder and master coincides with the themes that the whole Church meditates on at the approach of the Great Jubilee; it marks out for us the path of true wisdom that must be laid open to so many young people who search for meaning in their lives and for an art of living.”

He continued, in the same letter, to give us a mission:

“I welcome your initiatives at diffusing Montfortian spirituality in forms that are suitable to different

During his whole lifetime, Montfort bore this project of a missionary team dedicated to making Jesus Christ known and loved. He worked towards its realization by calling people in his footsteps and by asking the help of his friend Poullart des Places, founder of the Spiritains. In March 1716, about a month before he died, Montfort organized a group of lay people to make a pilgrimage at Notre-Dame des Ardilliers, in view of obtaining from God “good missionaries walking in the footsteps of the Apostles” (*Rule of the White Penitents*, O.C. p. 816). One important quality of these missionaries is that they work in a spirit of collaboration with and submissiveness to the Church authorities (*Rule of the missionaries*, N° 22) to “renew the Christian spirit in the faithful” (*Rule of missionaries*, N° 56).

In his ardent *Prayer for Missionaries*, Montfort expressed his project. In his writing *True Devotion to Mary*, he stated that those who practice the devotion he proposes will be “the true apostles of the last days” (N° 59). When one gets acquainted with all the writings of Montfort and with the main events of his life, one sees that Montfort, through these statements doesn’t pretend to reveal a kind of divine timetable or calendar of the end of the world we could detect in contemporary events. Moreover, Montfort concludes in the following manner: “But when and how will this happen?... Only God knows: our role is to keep silent, to pray, to yearn and wait” (*TD* 59).

Interior and exterior practices

As human beings, we exist in time and in a body. Montfort is aware of that, so he suggests practices to help us live this gift of ourselves to Christ through Mary. He distinguishes between interior and exterior practices. According to Montfort, **interior practices** consist in “doing all our actions by Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, so as to do them more perfectly by Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, in Jesus and for Jesus” (*TD* 257).

When you are loved by someone who gives himself totally to you, the answer can only be to give yourself totally. That is why describing the true devotion of Montfort by referring to slavery only is incomplete and false! Montfort speaks of a “slavery” or “bondage” of love” (cf TD 55, 68, 113, 126, 231). It consists in giving oneself to Christ in a movement of total love. This movement of love is an answer to the love Christ already gave us. A love perfectly given to and perfectly received by a human being: Mary. Those who want to enter into this devotion, says Montfort “ will give themselves to Mary body and soul, to belong to Christ in the same manner” (TD 55).

The urgency that this love be known

“Can one love what one doesn’t know? Can one love ardently what one knows imperfectly? Why is the lovable Jesus, Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, so little loved if not because it is little known or even ignored?” (LEW 8)

Since his youth, Montfort was aflame with the desire of making Jesus known. In 1700, the year of his ordination to priesthood, he wrote to his spiritual director:

“I deeply desire to bring people to know and love our Lord and His Mother. I desire to go in a simple manner, teaching catechism to the poor in the country... Considering the needs of the Church, I cannot help praying ceaselessly and with groaning for a small and poor company of good priests that exercise [that ministry] under the guidance of the Holy Virgin.” (Letter 5, 6 December 1700)

cultures, thanks to the collaboration of the members of your three institutes. Be also a support and a point of reference for the movements which take their inspiration from the message of Grignion de Montfort in order to give to Marian devotion an ever-surer authenticity. Renew your presence among the poor, your insertion into the pastoral activity of the Church, your availability for evangelization.” Message of Pope John Paul II to the Montfortian religious family on the celebrations.” (June 21, 1997)

December 8, 2003, remembering the 160 years since the first edition of the *True Devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mary*, published in 1843, Saint John Paul II wrote a letter to the Montfortian Family which bore the title: “*On the doctrine of your Founder*”.

In this message of Saint John Paul II we find an excellent reflection on Montfortian spirituality. He walks among the texts of Saint Louis de Montfort: the *Treatise on the True Devotion*, the *Secret of Mary*, the *Hymns*, and explains the origin of the motto on his episcopal coat of arms, “*Totus tuus*” (Treatise on the True Devotion, 233).

The first observation made by him, now as Pope, was on the evolution of Marian theology and the necessity to read and interpret it in the light of the Vatican Council II:

“It is a lived teaching of outstanding ascetic and mystical depth, expressed in a lively and passionate style that makes frequent use of images and symbols. However, the considerable development of Marian theology since St Louis Marie’s time is largely due to

the crucial contribution made by the Second Vatican Council. The Montfort teaching, therefore, which has retained its essential validity should be reread and reinterpreted today in the light of the Council.” (Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 1)

Saint John Paul II understood very well the meaning of the “slavery of love”, the expression used by Saint Louis Marie de Montfort to refer to the attitude of the Christian to realize the consecration to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary. It is a devotion that ought to lift us to holiness, since it orients us to charity, to the challenge to make ourselves servants of Jesus Christ in the selfless service of the poor, the needy, and the excluded. Mary was consistent with her “yes” (Lk 1, 38) and went at once to aid her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1, 39). Mary made her own the prayer of the whole people of Israel, recognizing the greatness of God in his love for the poor, the hungry, and those enslaved, through his merciful and liberating deeds (Lk1, 46-55).

This is why Saint John Paul II wrote:

“The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium states: “But while in the Most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5: 27), the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues” (n. 65). Holiness is the perfection of charity, of love of God and neighbour that is the object of Jesus’ greatest Commandment (cf. Mt 22: 38). It is also the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor 13: 13). Thus, in his Canticles St Louis Marie presents to the faithful in

Towards the perfect gift

Unfortunately, our self-donation to God and our brothers is imperfect. Caught by fear, driven by ambition, seduced by a consumer society, we do not dare to follow Christ perfectly by giving ourselves to Him totally. How can one progress towards the perfect gift of oneself, if not by asking Mary to include us into the total gift she made of herself to God. A gift marked by a profound humility (*TD 2*) and a total faith (*TD 214*). In other words, we give ourselves totally to Mary – a creature perfectly opened to God and given to Him – so that with her, in her and like here, we be perfectly given to God.

Paradoxical symbolism

Montfort wants us to understand how radical is the commitment he proposes to us in the spiritual way that is the “true devotion”. Gathering from his personal experience and his competence as a preacher, he uses the symbolism of slavery. What draws him to this symbol is not so much the idea of submission but that of belonging. A slave belongs totally to his master, more than a servant to his master, and even more than a child to his parents (cf *TD 169-172*). Now, the great desire burning in the heart of Montfort is to belong to Christ, to give himself to Christ as totally as Christ gave Himself to us: “After that, won’t we love this Eternal Wisdom that loved us more and still loves us more than its own life?” (*LEW 131*)

*“O my Jesus, my love, I love you
Nothing but you I want to love.
So ignored is the happiness
Of loving you, my Saviour.”*
(Hymn 45, 30)

By making us become what He is.”
(Hymn 64, 1)

We tend to perceive the Incarnation as a one time event: the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and reveals to her the Good News. Mary gives her agreement and the Incarnation takes place! But Incarnation is more than an event: it is a movement! A movement launched by the whole Trinity which aims at incorporating the whole humanity and cosmos in God. Created in Christ, we are called to be incorporated in Him so as to be in Him fully accomplished.

“Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made, marking us out to be adopted sons, through Jesus Christ. He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, that he would bring everything together under Christ” (*Eph 1:4-5.9-10*).

Mary was the first to be taken up into this great movement of the Incarnation. She gave her whole self to the “mystery of God’s purpose”. She was the first to let Christ inhabit and transform her, so that she became in Him the “beloved daughter of the Eternal Father” (*SM 68*).

The vocation of Mary, revelation of our own vocation

We too, like Mary, were taken up into this great movement of the Incarnation. This happened at our baptism. On that day, as the word ‘baptize’ originally meant, we were ‘plunged’ in Christ, in His total surrender to the love of the Father and in the total gift of himself to humanity. Montfort says repeatedly that the devotion he is proposing is “nothing but a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of our baptism” (*TD 162*; see also *TD 120, 126, 131, 238*).

this order the excellence of charity (Canticle 5), the light of faith (Canticle 6) and the firmness of hope (Canticle 7).

*In Montfort spirituality, the dynamism of charity is expressed in particular by the symbol of the slavery of love to Jesus, after the example and with the motherly help of Mary. It is a matter of full communion in the kenosis of Christ, communion lived with Mary, intimately present in the mysteries of the life of her Son. "There is nothing among Christians which makes us more absolutely belong to Jesus Christ and his holy Mother than the slavery of the will, according to the example of Jesus Christ himself, who took on the status of a servant for love of us" - formam servi accipiens - "and also according to the example of the holy Virgin who called herself the servant and handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1: 38). The Apostle refers to himself as "the slave of Christ' (servus Christi) as though the title were an honour. Christians are often so called in the Holy Scriptures" (cf. *Treatise on True Devotion, n. 72*). Indeed, the Son of God, who came into the world out of obedience to the Father in the Incarnation (cf. *Heb 10: 7*), subsequently humbled himself by making himself obedient unto death, and death on the Cross (cf. *Phil 2: 7-8*)." (Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 6)*

At present there exist some Catholic groups with a strong tendency to part from reality and not assume responsibility for one’s neighbor. They abandon the reading of the documents that refer to the Social Doctrine of the Church, do not interest themselves in the path of the Church post Vatican Council II and,

in many cases, they join together to recuperate pre-conciliar devotional practices, and they even use texts from some writings of Saint Louis de Montfort and practice the Montfortian consecration to justify their options.

The Montfortian Family does not find itself among these groups, and the Montfortian consecration ought to be what it is: the perfect renewal of the baptismal promises, which includes the solemn proclamation that *“I believe, as the Church believes and with the Church”*. We are in perfect communion with the Church. If those who practice this devotion do not accept the Pope as the visible sign of catholicity, they lose their bearings; they end up defending an ideology and they journey toward religious fundamentalism.

To those who dedicate themselves to spreading Montfortian consecration as a preparation for the “imminent end of the world”, we share with them these words of Saint John Paul II:

“This eschatological dimension is contemplated by St Louis Marie especially when he speaks of the “apostles of the latter times” formed by the Blessed Virgin to bring to the Church Christ’s victory over the forces of evil (cf. Treatise on True Devotion, nn. 49-59). This is in no way a form of “millenarianism”, but a deep sense of the eschatological character of the Church linked to the oneness and saving universality of Jesus Christ. The Church awaits the glorious coming of Jesus at the end of time. Like Mary and with Mary, the saints are in the Church and for the Church to make her holiness shine out and to extend to the very ends of the earth and the end of time the work of Christ, the one Savior.”
(Letter, December 8, 2003, Paragraph 8)

MONTFORTIAN HERITAGE IN NORTH AMERICA

The testimony of a great disciple of Montfort...

To mark the 160th anniversary of the first publication of Montfort’s work *True Devotion to Mary*, Pope saint John-Paul II wrote a letter to the Montfortian Congregations. In it, he testifies to his own experience:

“As far as I’m concerned, the reading of that book was of great help to me in my youth: In it, ‘I found the answer to my doubts’ raising from the fear that ‘an excess in devotion to Mary could compromise the priority of cult due to Christ’ (Gift and Mystery). Under the guidance of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, I realized that when one lives the Mystery of Mary in Christ, there is no such risk. In fact, the mariological doctrine of the saint ‘is rooted in the trinitarian mystery and in the truth of the Incarnation of the Word of God’” (ibidem) (From the Vatican, 8 December 2003)

Such a testimony from a saint disciple of Montfort brings us to the very heart of what Montfort calls “The True Devotion to Mary.” Here are in short its main elements.

At the heart of the true devotion: the mystery of the Incarnation

The central mystery of the Christian faith is the Incarnation (cf TD 248):

*“To save human beings,
God found a marvellous secret:
He became what we are*